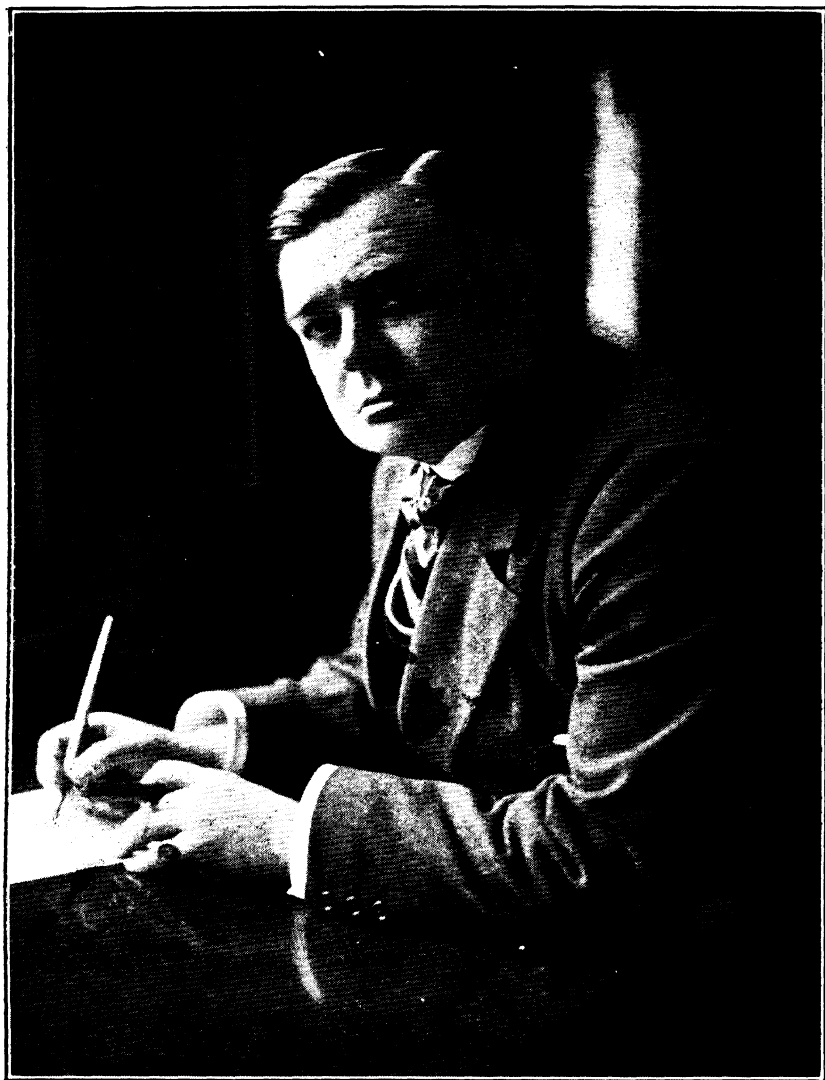


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OSCAR ASCHE



[Photograph by Compton Collier

OSCAR ASCHE

Frontispiece]

OSCAR ASCHE

HIS LIFE

by
HIMSELF



*Publishers
since 1812*

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To my old stable companion
H. R. HIGNETT

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OSCAR ASCHE : HIS LIFE

CHAPTER ONE

My Boyhood

MY very earliest memory is of my fourth birthday-party. Dressed in a wonderful red plush frock ornamented with white silk embroidered cartwheels, sitting on a wooden step by a door in a large room, I am helping myself generously to strawberries and cream which a pretty little girl is holding out to me. A few minutes later the door behind me opens suddenly inwards, catches me on my humpty-dumpty, and sweeps me along the polished floor, accompanied by strawberries, cream, and pretty girl. That was the first up and down of a life that has been fairly full of them. It must have impressed itself on my child's brain, for, thirty years and more later I was able to lead some friends to this same room, unaided, unguided. There was the door opening inwards and down two steps to the floor.

It was Mack's Hotel, Geelong, Victoria, where I was born on January 26th, 1871.

It was kept by my father, a Norwegian, a graduate of Christiana University, a barrister by profession. He had emigrated because a girl had jilted him, and chose Australia as his tent of Achilles. He never mastered the English language, though able to speak Latin and Greek fluently, and therefore was debarred following his profession.

In turn he was mounted policeman, gold-digger, storekeeper, land agent and publican. He was one of the pioneers. He knew Melbourne when it consisted of tents and tin huts ; a well-known figure throughout Victoria, especially in the old gold-mining areas. "Tom the boy" he was called—the strongest man I have ever known, naturally strong, but undisciplined. His grip was prodigious. With either hand he could squeeze a pewter pot as if it were paper. Very few would shake hands with him who knew him, without warning him first to be careful. I only shook hands with him once in my life. He was an old man then. But he retained his strength till shortly before his death.

He could drive his fist through any door-panel, or rather, hammer it through, and he was ever ready to do it if "dared",

or to win a bet. One of his old gold-digging pals, one of the Halls of Mount Morgan fame, whilst chatting together at the Surrey Oval during a test match, related how in Ballarat one night, when father was returning home from a late but lucky sitting at euchre, of which game he was very fond, two ruffians attacked him, with the obvious intention of robbing him. He seized each man by the nape of the neck and swung their heads together in one crack, and then dragged them along to the police. On arrival it was discovered that one man was dead from fracture of the skull, and the other suffering from concussion. He lived, however, and confessed to the assault. Although only 5 ft. 10½ inches in height, he measured 54 inches round the chest and 17 inches round the forearm. His was an up-and-down life. He would make thousands over land, to lose it in gold-mines. I suppose I inherited this trait from him, as I did my strength.

I was his favourite son, though he often gave me "a good thrashing", as he called it, but it was the reverse of good in my opinion. He was very touchy on the subject of his bad English, and anyone failing to understand what he said touched him on the raw. And we boys—my elder brother Will and I—taking care beforehand to have the door open behind us for a rapid retreat, and keeping the table between him and us, would lead him on to talk on some subject in which he was interested, and then break in with: "What, Father?" "What did you say?" "What was that?" He would repeat the sentence slowly. If on top of that we again asked: "What, Father?" he would bite and reach for us across the table. But we were out of the door, over the hills and far away. In an hour's time he had forgotten all about it.

I remember once, when quite a small kiddie in Geelong, how I tried to make him stand and deliver. The Sunday before this happened, mother was out walking with us children—Willie, myself and my sister Gunilda—as was her custom between church and dinner. My sister, who was a little devil, suddenly rushed into the sea in her Sunday frock, up to her waist, poor mother fluttering on the water's edge like any hen with a duckling, beseeching her to come out. "I will if you won't punish me," said Gunilda. Of course, mother promised.

"I'll come out if you will give me a shilling for lollies" (Australian for sweets).

Mother promised. Gunilda came out. Mother paid the shilling and we shared the loot.

Well, the following Sunday, mother not being very well, father took us out on the beach, Gunilda whispered me to go in and get some sweets. I was afraid to be a coward, so in I went, in my Sunday best, and waited for father to begin. I wanted him to

beseech me to come out. But not he! He stood there, eyeing me silently, his face red as a sunset and his long yellow Viking beard standing out like quills upon the fretful porcupine. So I spoke first. "I'll come out if you will promise not to punish me," I said. "By Creation!" he burst out, his favourite oath; in fact, his one and only oath, and only used under great provocation or pleasure. "By Creation!"

"I'll come out," I continued, "if you will give me a shilling for lollies."

At this he started skimming flat beach pebbles at me, and he was a good shot. So I came ashore, and got it good and strong. But he was a good old chap. Good-hearted and generous to everyone; afraid of nothing except mother, and she could tame him with one piercing glance from her black-currant eyes. A Kentish woman, farming stock, a good cook and housekeeper, and a wonderful broody hen of a mother. God rest her soul. She had no easy life; never certain whether father was making thousands or losing them, always having to smooth out troubles he was for ever making. I remember, for example, when John and William Redmond visited Australia to preach about Ireland's grievances, no hotel in Melbourne would give them accommodation. Now my father at that time owned and ran The Union Club Hotel, Collins Street. To him the Redmonds came with their tale of having been turned down by Menzies' and Scott's and other hotels. Would he house them? Of course he would, and as the hotel was wellnigh crowded out, it being a race or show week, father installed them in his and mother's own room. He and mother had to shake-down in the sitting-room. No sooner, however, had they entered the hotel than the other guests, without exception, protested and threatened to leave unless the Redmonds were turned out. But father, to whom Irish and English politics meant nothing, told the protestors that they could all go, and began carrying out their luggage himself into the street. Mother had to come to the rescue and smooth that out. But the Redmonds remained. The old man would never be put upon or have his leg pulled without retaliating. No one joked at his expense without paying for it. I remember once when I was at the Melbourne Grammar School. The family had moved to Sydney. It was Melbourne Cup time and father always attended that. He would take me from the school the evening before to have dinner with his pals at Menzies Hotel, and the next day would take me to see the Cup run. Well, this year he had dressed at the Union Club when I had called and waited for him. Being a fine warm spring evening, he wore no overcoat; just full evening dress, white waistcoat, coral buttons and studs, his great Viking beard gilding his shoulders and, crowning all, his white topper—the only

headgear I, or anyone else, ever saw him wear since his gold-digging days. We called in for a sherry at Scott's—or rather, father did; I was not allowed to touch alcohol or tobacco until I was twenty-one, so I had ginger-beer. From Scott's we were making towards Menzies' when we met a mudcart, filled to the brim with wet slimy street mud, coming towards us. My father was next the gutter. The driver of the cart, a big ill-conditioned fellow, was at the horse's head. As we got nearer, he looked my father up and down in his full regalia and said something about "a bloody old masher". At the same time he gave his horse's head a jerk, with the result that the horse came to a sudden standstill and a quantity of the slimy mud was shot out of the top of the cart, splashing my father's beautiful white shirt and waistcoat. "By Creation!" he burst forth, and like lightning he gripped that driver by scruff of neck and seat of trousers and, lifting him above his head, shot him like a squealing pig up into the air and plomp into the middle of that vile pond of filthy mud. Then he turned back to re-dress himself. The rest of the evening he was in wonderful spirits.

The next day we went to the Melbourne Cup. Father, of course, as usual, had backed several horses. He listened to anyone's tips. This time I gave him a tip. "Arsenal!" "Vot do you know of Arsenal, my Oscar?" he asked. I told him frankly I knew nothing about the horse, but that it struck me as singularly appropriate after the incident of the driver thrown into the mud the previous evening. He looked at me for a second, then laughed and smacked me on the back, and he smacked—not tapped. "By Creation, you are a young ruffian," he said. However, he took my tip, went over to old Joe Thompson, and called: "Yo! Ten pounds Arsenal!" And Arsenal won at twenty-five to one, and he gave me a pony (£25).

He patronized every sport, whether he understood anything about it or no. It was with him that I was present at the first Test Match in Melbourne, in 1876. The match was between Lillywhite's team and Australia. He knew nothing about cricket, but he went because his pals went, and wherever he went I had to go, and I was only about five at the time, mother had to come with me, and she was always glad to have an outing. All I can remember was shouting and crowds and tents. It was in that match Charles Bannerman, perhaps Australia's greatest bat, made 165 and retired hurt.

It was also with my father, but many years later, that I witnessed my first Waterloo Cup, run at Digger's Rest. Father, having backed the winner, bought me a greyhound pup, one of a litter a trainer was showing for sale. This pup afterwards sired a winner

of many stakes, a bitch who from one of her litter provided me with my second longtail, a fawn bitch, Nelly, of whom later. Years and years later greyhounds were to cost me a fortune. Kismet !

When the family moved to Melbourne, I went to my first school, a boys' and girls' school at Laurel Lodge, Dandenong, about twenty-five miles from Melbourne. I, together with another prospective pupil, Harry Goyder, was driven down by his father, Mr. Goyder, in a trap and pair. Mr. Goyder owned a celebrated white steeple-chaser, Sussex, nearly always ridden by that celebrated jockey and still more celebrated poet, Adam Lindsay Gordon. Harry and I became fast pals. Years after he assisted me in amateur theatricals, and played Iago to my Othello. The only other boy at the school was Geoffrey Syme, son of the proprietor of, and now in turn the proprietor himself of, the Melbourne *Age*. There were about ten girls of various ages at the school, so there was great competition among them for us as sweethearts. We were in great demand. There is nothing much to record of any interest. The head mistress was a Miss Shaw, a hard-faced martinet who thrashed me day in day out, with or without reason, certainly without any lasting result. For an example :

It was the custom before breakfast to gather for prayers, when each pupil would read a verse from the Bible lesson of the week. I used to count down to my verse at the start, so as to be familiar with the words when it came to my turn to read. One morning I, as usual, counted down, and spotted my own particular verse. It was from the Old Testament, and not bowdlerised. I scanned it. Horror ! What should I do ? If I read it I would be thrashed. If I refused to read it I would be thrashed. At last my turn came. I began—"And all they shall be slain who—" and then I stopped.

And Miss Shaw called out : "Go on, Oscar." As usual, she was not looking at her Bible.

Again I started, and again I baulked.

"Go on, or I'll thrash you," cried the inexorable one.

I looked round. My fellow pupils had their eyes glued to the verse. Some were blushing, others were tittering.

So I went on. I read the terrible verse to the bitter end, amidst a horrible silence, my poor cheeks blazing with shame.

Miss Shaw stood up. Everyone stood up. She reached for the cane hanging on the wall, stalked to the door, opened it and, fixing her eyes on me, waited for the poor lamb to come to the slaughter. And the poor lamb walked through the open door. The door shut behind us, and the poor little lamb got it on the bare.

The injustice of it rankled.

On the following Sunday morning we were at church as usual,

and the old parson, by name Carter, started reading the First Lesson. A thrill went through me as I recognized the chapter. Was the horrible verse included in the lesson? It was! What would the Rev. Mr. Carter do? Would *he* be thrashed by that hard-faced man who handed the plate round and whom we all looked upon as a male Miss Shaw? I waited. It came to the verse. And the Rev. Carter read aloud: "And all male children shall be slain by the morning light."

And I cried aloud tears of disappointment, of vexation. The reverend gentleman stopped and looked down at me. I *felt* Miss Shaw's beady black eyes gimleting into me. I felt the injustice of it all. And I stood up there in the church and called out to the Rev. Mr. Carter: "It is not true. That is not the verse. *This* is—" And before Miss Shaw, who was at the extreme outside of the pew, could reach me, I read the unexpurgated verse aloud.

I don't know what happened exactly. I did not know what should happen. I supposed men had been burned at the stake for less. The Rev. Carter waited whilst I followed the stalking Miss Shaw out of the church. The rest remained behind with the under-teacher, a Miss Barrow. It was a glorious sunny day. "What a day to die on!" I thought. Slowly I followed the executioner to Laurel Lodge. Arrived there, I was shut in a room alone, and the door locked. I had some idea of escaping my doom by getting out of the window, running off into the ranges, and becoming a bushranger like the Kelly gang. But I had no horse, no revolver. Then I heard the school return. Miss Shaw had, I thought, been getting the scaffold ready. At last the door opened, and two of the eldest girls told me to come along. They were, I suppose, about twelve years of age. And both whispered to me: "Stand up to the old pig." That quite cheered me.

All sat down to dinner: the usual salt beef, carrots, and hasty pudding. I had no dinner. After dinner the whole school and staff, consisting of about fifteen souls, gathered in the one and only schoolroom, and, led by Miss Shaw, all knelt down and repeated word for word her prayers for my reformation. Then she stood up. All stood up. And she drew out a brand-new cane. It had not been tampered with. No horsehair down a split. Then she beckoned me to a form. But into the room strode the Rev. Carter. He asked a few questions, and was answered. Having grasped the facts, he turned quietly round to the indignant Miss Shaw and told her off. She was, he told her, silly, narrow-minded, intolerant. With that, and a pat on the head to me, he strode out. I was never thrashed after that.

The only other thing to relate is that it was during my stay at this school that I met the Kelly gang, that notorious band of

bushrangers, consisting of Ned and Dan Kelly, Stephen Burn, and Dave (?) Hart. We were out walking one day, in file as usual, along the Fern Tree Gully Road, when four horsemen passed us at a lively canter, making in the direction of the Dandenong Range, one of the hiding-places of the Kelly Gang. It was not till later that we knew of their identity and that the police were in pursuit a few hours behind. When Ned Kelly was eventually captured, in 1880, after his comrades had been either shot or burned to death in the little bush hotel at Glenrowan where they were besieged by the police, I, like many hundreds of boys, signed petitions for his reprieve. He was our Dick Turpin. But he was hanged.

I ended my term at this school by appearing as Henry VIII, surrounded by my six wives, a tableau meant as a sort of breaking-up entertainment—my first taste of anything even remotely connected with the stage. My next school was the St. James' Grammar School, Melbourne, where, thanks to the grounding I received at Dandenong, I won first prize for Biblical knowledge.

The Dean of Melbourne, who presented me with this prize, foretold that I should one day enter the Church. Hearing of this, mother, of course, tried to influence me to fulfil the good Dean's prophecy. For once, father did not agree. "My Oscar a parson!" he exclaimed. "Rubbish! They would soon have the coat off his back. Make him a lawyer. Then he can become a member of Parliament and make laws to suit himself, and become rich." So I went to the Melbourne Grammar School, now, as then, the finest public school in Australia, to study with a view to the legal profession. But, although I ended my career there by winning the prizes for Geography and History and the Examination prize, I am afraid I paid more attention to athletics than study. I was refused membership of the School Dramatic Society, because Peggy Miles, the master at its head, told me I should never be any good on the stage. Poor Peggy! He afterwards committed suicide. Not immediately, but some years later.

I was a boarder at the Grammar School, my people having in the meantime moved to Sydney, where they had bought the Royal Hotel, George Street. The Royal was then Sydney's premier hotel. George Street, in which it stood—and it was still standing in 1923, a derelict old wooden building used as a hostel for English soldiers who had been lured to Australia by promises of work, only to find its promises like piecrust, and unable to procure employment (a most damnable piece of deception on the part of the Australian Government; but of this more hereafter)—George Street, as I was about to state, is a most interesting old street. It was the original bullock-wagon track from up-country down to the water-side, now Circular Quay, where the wagons unloaded

their bales of wool into the holds of the famous old wool-clippers, *The Cutty Sark*, *Thermopolis*, and others. On either side of this bullock-track men erected shops, saloons, and shanties of every description. In places the track widens where a pool lay round which the wagons skirted. In one such wide spot now stands Sydney's Cathedral and Town Hall. Opposite the Royal Hotel, and in other places, the track narrowed, where the bullock teams were threaded between giant gum-tree stumps which the settlers were too lazy to grub out. Thus was George Street formed, a long, irregular snake of a street, infinitely more picturesque than the chessboard lay-out of dull and drab Melbourne.

To George Street and the Royal Hotel came all the travelling world. The Royal Hotel housed at different times such well-known English actors and actresses as Dion Boucicault and his son Dot and daughter Nina, Charles Warner, G. V. Brooke, Genevieve Ward, J. L. Toole, Walter Montgomery, George Rignold, Fred Leslie, and Nellie Farren, Kyrle Bellew and Brown Potter, and others of lesser light. Members of the visiting and stock companies used to foregather to drink and play pool there, some of whom I still meet in London: Harold Lloyd, Tom Lovell, and Cecil Ward. The Brough and Boucicault Co., of which these gentlemen were members, included Robert Brough, Dot Boucicault, George Titheradge (the original Silver King in Australia), George Anson (a great comedian), Patty Browne, Emma Temple, Mrs. Brough, Bessie Major (who after played with me in *Kismet*, *Merry Wives*, *Chu Chin Chow*, and *Cairo* in London) gave performances of old and modern English comedy far superior to any similar productions I have witnessed in London. Then there was George Rignold in his world-famous impersonation of Henry V, also the finest Mark Antony in *Julius Cæsar*, but a bad Macbeth, and only a fair Othello. G. V. Brooke, Barry Sullivan, and Montgomery were before my time. But my first memory is of the old Dion Boucicault, Dot and Nina in *Arrah-na-Pogue* at the Theatre Royal, Melbourne. John L. Toole was a failure. He had the misfortune of following George Anson in similar parts, just as Lewis Waller failed in comparison with George Rignold in Henry V. The divine Sarah also visited Australia, and also Arthur Dacre and Amy Roselle, years after I had made my first appearance with them at the Opéra Comique, London. They failed, and committed suicide.

I was, therefore, pretty well steeped in theatrical matters long before I left school, which I did after leaving the Melbourne Grammar, about the age of sixteen. I travelled from Melbourne to Sydney as one of the cricket team to play Sydney Grammar. Another member of the team, and an old pal, Gus Duke, stayed with

me at the Royal Hotel. Eventually I did not play against Sydney Grammar, owing to weakness after an illness. It was the Christmas holidays. The hotel was fairly empty. One night, Gus, my brother Willie, who had come from the country to spend Christmas, and I were playing hide-and-seek on the top floor, together with a girl whom we will call Flo, a friend of my sister Gunilda. We three boys were all somewhat mashed on Flo, a fluffy-haired flapper about sixteen. I suppose we were making a devil of a row. However, Gunilda suddenly gave us warning that mother was coming up the stairs. We all skedaddled: Gunilda to her room, Gus by a circuitous route to his room on the floor below, and Will on to the roof. Flo slipped into the bathroom, and I, finding my escape cut off, made for the first bedroom door. The room was empty, and I hid under the bed. I heard mother calling us, and then asking Flo, who pretended she was just coming from her bath, if she had seen us. Flo replied that we had been upstairs, but she had gone to her bath and thought we had gone to bed. My mother kissed her good night, the door opened, and Flo came into the room where I lay hidden. It was her room. Here was a predicament indeed! She would yell, of course, if I made my presence known. On the other hand, I could not stay there all night. She sat down on the bed and began to remove her slippers. As she put the first one under the bed, her hand touched my face, and before I could stop her she gave a yell. Back came mother, who was still hunting, and had heard the scream. "A man is under my bed!" screamed Flo. Without a moment's hesitation, mother called out: "Come out, Oscar!" And out I came. "Down to your room," said mother, her black eyes blazing anger. How I cursed Flo. But I forgave her later. So to my room I went, which I shared with my brother. He was not there. I sat on the bed and waited. Presently I heard footsteps coming rapidly down the corridor. "Will," thought I. And I peeped out of the door. It was a procession. Father was in the lead, and the other processionist was mother, a length or so in the rear. What an awe-inspiring sight was the old man! He was moving fast for a big man, barefooted, nightgown flowing out behind him, his long beard blowing to either side, his face like a turkey-gobbler, his eyes glaring, his great hands clenched. Now the old man that evening had just had a carbuncle cut out, so he was not in any case in the best of humours before he had heard about Oscar. I was in for it. No use locking the door. He would burst that in, even if it were the door of a safe. The window was three stories up. No use kneeling down under the pretence of praying. That was no sanctuary. Father was a Lutheran and would respect nothing.

So I sat on the edge of my bed, as near the right-hand wall

at the head of the bed as possible. The procession entered, father an easy first. Father was red, mother was white; I was, or felt, a sickly green. "Red on Green plays White," I muttered half-unconsciously, thinking of a game of pool. With his favourite oath "By Creation!" Red took an awful slog at Green. Green ducked. Red's knuckles crashed against the wall. Green dived under Red's arm, cannoned off White, who was twittering in the doorway, and so off the table and out of the game—for the present, at any rate. I was down the passage like a hare. But where could I go? Father would search the place for me. I could not get out of the hotel. All the doors were locked. If I went to Gus's room, the old man would be sure to go there. Then I had a brain-wave. Upstairs I went again, and tapped on Flo's door. I called through the door who I was. She opened the door slightly, and I explained the position to her, and that this was the one room they would not dream of searching. She was a good sport and let me in, and locked the door, and we listened to the hunt pass by. At the first sign of dawn, I crept out of the room and went downstairs, with the intention of staying at our private house at Petersham, a few miles out, until the affair had blown over. But the old man was before me. There he sat in a basket arm-chair in the hall, fully-dressed, frock-coat, Viking beard, white top-hat, and his malacca cane. Not so good. Fortunately he was looking out into the street, and did not see me. Upstairs again, where I met John, boots and porter, a Norwegian, and very fond of me. I told him my position. He guessed something was wrong, because father had the keys of the tradesmen's and side doors and would not let them be opened. He was watching the one bolt-hole. So John took me to the billiard-room, opened the window, and with his help I dropped into the lane, near Larry Foley's hotel. He also brought down my kitbag with some clothes, etc., and off I went to Petersham. Gunilda, Flo, and Gus arrived later in the day, and told me the old man was puzzled how I had got out. I proposed to Flo, was accepted, and spent a very happy engagement. But the bells never rang for us.

When I saw father a week later, though his hand was still in bandages, he only asked: "Where have you been, you young ruffian?"

Father could enjoy a joke with anyone even if it were at his expense. I remember once dressing and making-up at our private house as a German, grey beard and moustache I had got by me for some amateur theatricals, smoked glasses, and top-hat. I took an old grip with me and went by train into Sydney. I drove up to the Royal Hotel in a cab, and walked up to the booking-office. Father was standing near by. I booked a room in some German

name. I told the book-keeper I had just arrived on one of the German boats. My luggage would follow in the morning. Would she pay my cab. I spoke horrible English, worse than father's. John, the porter, went out and paid the cab, and then took my bag, filled with clods of earth, to my room. As I passed father he spoke a few words in German to me. I had forgotten he knew German. I mumbled something guttural and hurried upstairs to my room. John asked me if I wanted anything. Yes, a small bottle of champagne. This was brought me, and some sandwiches, and I said good night. As soon as John had left the room I went into my own room, which was always kept for me unless the hotel was crowded, and changed into myself again. Then I slipped into mother's room and took a jewel case of hers full of gewgaws and slipped this into the old German's bag. My disguise I had put away in my chest of drawers. Then I got out by the back door and entered from the front. It was about eight o'clock and I often blew in to stay the night, father and mother always glad to see me. I went upstairs and when I came down I remarked what a funny old fellow I had seen prowling about the passages. "Vot kind of fellow?" I described the German. "Where was he, Oscar?" "Near your room," I answered. That settled mother. She flew upstairs. She was soon back. "Lady Macbeth! Tom! my jewel case has gone!" "By Creation!" said Tom. "It must have been that German you allowed to come in without any luggage," she exclaimed. Father tried to deny that he had allowed the German to come in. "And he had a handbag," he added. I suggested calling in the police. No, father would go and interview the German himself. The German was not in his room. Then mother and I went up. She opened his bag full of earth, and her beloved jewel case was recovered. Then the police were sent for and the hotel searched from top to bottom for the German. It was a mystery. Mother never tired of talking about it. Father got fed up with being asked his theories. Then one day when mother was on her favourite topic, the German, I put on the pair of smoked glasses and looked at the old man. He tumbled. He drew me aside. "I vill give you a fiver if you vill tell mother."

"No, not for a fiver. She would kill me with those black piercing eyes from her thrown-back head." And father knew his fiver was safe. But he always used to burst out laughing ever after when she started about that terrible German. And she would look at him, and remark quietly but cuttingly: "Tom, you are taking too much whisky."

Now discussions started as to my career. I wanted to go on the land. Neither mother nor father would agree to that. My stepbrother John was on the land, and not doing too well, and

Willie, three years my senior, had been a jackeroo, a sort of apprentice, on a cattle or sheep station, and had chucked it and was now learning plumbing. Poor Will, he never had brains to be anything. When he died he was an up-country policeman. Then I suggested the stage. The stage! I side-stepped father just in time to evade a right-hand swing. The discussion ended there and then abruptly.

Whilst they were making up their minds, I accepted a school-friend's invitation, his people being connected with shipping, to accompany him on a voyage to Hong-Kong, Shanghai, and other Chinese ports. His father was paying all exes. for him and any companion he chose. He was rather a weakling, and several times I had stood by him at school. Anyhow, I accepted, and off we went.

I am not going to describe our voyage in detail. So many travellers have done the trip to Chinese ports that there would be no novelty about it, especially as I have only a hazy recollection of the different ports. We kept mostly to the ship and strayed not from the beaten path. True, we saw an execution of pirates on the sea-front—an unpleasant sight—prisoners undergoing torture in the canque, a Chinese theatre, tasted Chinese food—all as many thousands have done. But China certainly added to my paint-box colours and atmosphere to be used in stage production. And the Chinaman, or, I should say, the Chinese, is a good sport and a gentleman. And what a gambler! Go into a Chinese shop and buy some goods. When the bill is presented, the proprietor will as often as not suggest tossing double or quits. You always get a fair deal, and a Chinese always keeps his word. Written contracts are no more binding to him than his spoken word. And he will stick to his contract even if it mean ruin to him. He is a gentleman. How different to the Japanese, who, if things are going against them, will wriggle out of any agreement. To them, as to the old German, a contract is but a scrap of paper, to be torn up at will. In this they also resemble certain Australian theatrical managers famous for their crooked dealings. Mark Twain's "Heathen Chinee" can be applied to these gentlemen, not to the real Chinese.

We had fine weather all the voyage, and my chum Bob certainly was the better for it. We were away six months in all. When I returned, I found I had been apprenticed to an architect, a dear old Frenchman, Morell. I was with him quite a short time, as he died, but the little knowledge I learnt has been useful to me in stage production. Then followed a course of tuition under a Mr. Kinlock, and a year or so of waste, except that I learnt to box with Larry Foley, and sparred with both Paddy Slavin and Peter Jackson. I used to scale between 12 and 13 stone in those days. At eighteen and nineteen I was 13 st. 10 lb., won several heavy-weight amateur bouts, long-distance swims, and could clear the



Photograph by Goodfellow

OSCAR ASCHÉ AT THE AGE OF 21 YEARS

high-jump bar at 5 ft. 6 ins. These sports, with football for the old Waratah Club, and cricket, filled in the bulk of my time. For pocket-money I had to rely on backing horses, as the old man only allowed me a pound a week. However, things had to end somehow. I spent some time in holidays at Najanti, Victoria, on a vineyard owned by one Thomas Blayney, a wonderful old Irishman. I used to go out shooting and riding with him, and he gave me a taste for country life. So I eventually made up my mind to decide my fate myself, and leave home. Having made up my mind, it was not long before I had got everything ready. I was over eighteen now. Quite a man. I would lead a man's life. And that was that.

CHAPTER TWO

I Run Away From Home

I HAD recently experienced an unusual streak of good luck at racing, and had about £80 in my pocket, so I decided with this "to hump the bluey", Australian for "to go on the tramp", the "bluey" being the necessary blankets, which are generally a blue-grey, and "hump" because the blankets, being rolled up and strapped from one shoulder to opposite hip, gives a man the appearance of a hump. But I decided to do things in style. I bought a horse with a touch of thoroughbred in him, a five-year-old gelding, a black with a white blaze and one white stocking, and minus his off-eye, for a tenner, a second-hand saddle and bridle, etc., another eight or ten pounds; then blankets of the proper hue, a double-barrelled 12-bore muzzle loader, a pinfire revolver—the latter probably a Ned Kelly touch—powder, shot, cartridges, frying-pan, grid, spoon, fork, etc., etc., etc., not forgetting the inevitable billy: all contained in a strong canvas sack, probably cost another twenty pounds or so. Everything O.K., I slipped away from home one warm spring evening, leaving a note to mother, telling her I was going for a holiday, picked up my horse and kit at a stable a couple of miles away, and, accompanied by a wire-haired terrier, Parkes, named after Sir Harry Parkes, whom he greatly resembled on account of his fushy white whiskers, and Nelly, a fawn greyhound bitch, a granddaughter of my first greyhound, and whose dam had been a big winner, I ambled out of Sydney South. I had planned no route. I went south because my native colony was south, and I had some sort of idea of riding up to the gates of my old school and showing off. A little silver compass which I had won for swimming at St. Kilda baths some years previously would guide me, with a small map of Australia. The compass was attached to one end of a silver Albert, together with a silver sovereign-case which held ten quid, and at the other end a silver hunter watch. The remainder of my money, about £30, was stuffed into a pocket of my body belt. I felt indeed a king.

At daylight we pulled up at Parramatta, had a good breakfast, and bought a seven-pound bag of flour to make my damper (bush substitute for bread), and after a couple of hours' rest, jogged

along south. At midday we halted under the shade of a large wattle tree by a creek, grilled some chops bought at the butcher's and local store in the last township, boiled some billy tea, put the hobbles on Sambo, the horse, and slept till the heat of the day had passed. Then we ambled on till sunset, made our fire, ate what remained of our dinner, together with a couple of spuds done in their jackets in the embers, billy tea; hobbled out Sambo, pulled out our blankets, and so to sleep under the stars.

What a wonderful life that was! To wake up in the fresh morning air, with the smell of the trees and earth; to hear the magpies and the laughing jackasses in concert; the flight of many-hued parrots as they flashed from tree to tree overhead; to see the little white-tailed rabbits scuttling along from log to log, every now and then stopping to sit up and gaze around in search of danger; a wallaby loping across the track, dragging its tail behind it; lizards thus early in the morning crawling out of their hiding-places to peep at the world; Parkes, still snoring, nestling under the bluey; Nelly shivering in disapproval at my feet, by the still smouldering fire; Sambo hobbling about not far away, cropping what grass he can find, powdered with dew. No cares, no postman with bills, or income-tax demands, no newspaper with sensational headlines: only the glorious vastness of the Australian bush around and the simmering blue sky above. A stretch of one's limbs and a long-drawn-out yawn, which causes a commotion amongst bunny-land, and sends the parakeets screaming away in indignation, and we rouse ourselves up. A few dry gum-leaves on the embers and some twigs and branches on top, and the fire is blazing again. Then, taking the billy, our canvas bottle of water filled at the midday creek having been used the night before, we go in search of water. Sambo's hoof-marks guide us to where he has already had his morning swig, a deep pool in a rocky creek with little pebbles at the bottom. Here I strip and have a bathe, joined by Parkes, Nelly of course, sniffing the air in contempt and shivering on the bank.

Through the trees some distance away we catch sight of a company of native companions (of the crane family) solemnly going through their quadrille-like movements. On approaching nearer, they sight us, and take to the wing. From under the bank a wild duck scuttles out along the water, feigning to be maimed, thus seeking to lure us after her and so away from her little brood floating under the bank. So we turn back and dress by the fire. The billy is put on, and whilst it is taking its time to boil we go out with guns in search of food. Parkes is soon busy and starts a rabbit from a log. Its career is ended by a charge of No. 4. Nelly I have left behind, tied up, because she will chase everything that

moves, and she is likely to damage toes and stops in this rough timber land. Her usefulness comes in when we start a hare in more open or agricultural country. That is her duty, for I never shoot a hare. Master Bunny is skinned and cleaned and spread-eagled on a couple of sticks before the red fire, a couple of bacon-rashers skewered into his back. In twenty minutes, breakfast. And now for the morning pipe. I have never been allowed to smoke, and a Richmond Gem or Old Judge cigarette has been my only indulgence in secret. But being now a man, out to see the world, I have a brand-new briar pipe and some black twisted plug tobacco. Ten minutes later I have parted with my breakfast and wish I were at home. Parkes seems quite amused about it, and wags his tail, but Nelly seems genuinely concerned. However, after a couple of hours' sleep I am in the pink again and off the camp starts south.

Day after day of this glorious life, sticking to the main road where Cobb's coaches used to run between Sydney and Melbourne. But all we meet is an occasional flock of sheep and their drovers and dogs, a slow-moving buggy, or a sundowner (tramp).^{*} A word and a pipeful is generally exchanged with such wayfarers, and then on again. Occasionally a small township, where we replenish our supplies of tea, sugar, flour, bacon, etc., and sometimes chops and a small leg of mutton. Beef we never meet with, and one cannot carry meat as it is soon blown. It must be cooked at once in hot weather. The gun supplies our meat larder, parrot, rabbit, an occasional hare, thanks to Nelly, a wallaby, of which only the tail is worth anything, yabba-yabbas, a fresh-water crayfish, which one catches by means of a line and piece of raw meat, and duck when in season. After a while I get accustomed to the pipe, but not devoted to it. Nelly hates it. After loafing off and on the road about a fortnight we pull up at a small township hotel on the way to Goulburn. I have lost my map, so I don't know what it is called, and to ask would merely display your ignorance, and you would be called a new chum.[†] I go under the veranda and in, having hitched Sambo up with other horses outside. The bar is crowded, or seems so. Perhaps half a dozen men besides the villainous-looking proprietor and his more villainous-looking mother. One of the men, a boundary-rider, is shouting drinks. I am included. They call for whisky. I call for port. Why port? Because wine is the only alcohol I have ever tasted. And after typhoid fever

^{*} A sundowner, for the benefit of those who do not know, is a tramp who sometimes his days walking as to arrive at a station at sundown. Hospitality is shown him for that night, though, as a matter of fact, it is rather like blackmail, because it has happened that when this has been neglected a rick has been burned or some such loss sustained. So this hospitality is, in a measure, an insurance.

[†] Often the name of the place is on the signboard of the post or general stores.

I had been ordered by the doctor a glass of port every morning at eleven. So I call for port.

The proprietor expresses surprise on his face, the old woman cackles and remarks something about "a bloody sucker", and some others blankly ask: "What is port, kid?" However, Mr. Bartender hands me over a large beer glass of what looks like port as regards colour. And I have to drink it. He told me afterwards, the next morning, that he had given me half-rum, half-brandy, as being the nearest he could get to port. After that glass I changed to the popular taste, whisky, it being my turn to shout. In paying for the round, I foolishly openly drew a sovereign from my silver case. I saw looks exchanged, and someone suggested a game of cards. There were too many for euchre, so we sat down, seven of us, to poker. By all the laws, I should have lost. I was blind, could scarcely distinguish a card, and the pack was probably marked. But I won. When I eventually nodded off to sleep I had won, so I discovered next morning, a matter of fifteen pounds, which had actually been added to my store in my body-belt, and about thirty shillings in silver in my breeches pocket. I am sure I had to thank for this the only man who had remained in the place till morning. He said his name was Jacques. I quoted from *As You Like It*, and he laughed. He told me he did not trust the proprietor and his mother, who were notorious vultures, but that the men I had been playing with were all right, some of them being shearing mates of his. He had just finished a big station and was on his way home, having had his left hand rather madly mauled in some station machinery. He was going my way for a bit, so we tramped off together. I on foot, of course, leading Sambo. I learnt something about him. He was a remittance man, a graduate of Cambridge University, a rowing blue, now a cockatoo—that is, a selector, a man who takes up from the Government several hundreds of acres, clears the land, and lives on it. After a time, if he is lucky, it becomes his. During the three days we keep company I learn a lot of life, and he gives me sterling advice. "Keep off cards, horses, and all such," he said. If only I had benefited by it! Well, we parted, and I never met him again. Jacques, the melancholy gentleman in exile! I drink to you!

At last, tiring of the main road, after leaving the last little township behind where there was quite a good general store which supplied several stations in a large radius with goods, and where I filled up, I turned off through a clearing to the left. I seemed to scent the sea and the salt air. Keeping due east, I eventually struck the coast after crossing a river south-east of Gouburn near a place called Noura, I think. And then I gazed upon a large bay of turquoise blue and snow-white sands, in places some rocky caves above

high-water mark, and merging into the trees and undergrowth which grew down to the edge of the sand. The beach seemed to run for miles and miles. It was about midday when we reached it. So I stripped and had a most refreshing swim in the crisp water, taking care to keep close in on account of possible sharks. Then dinner. A shoulder of mutton which I had bought the day before and was, I admit, a bit high, well-peppered, wrapped around with wet mould till it looked like a large mud pudding, was covered over with hot wood ashes, accompanied by two large spuds in their skins.

Whilst the cooking went on, I reconnoitred. Parkes had a wonderful nose for water, and soon led me to a tiny trickling creek or gutter some little distance away. It was quite cool and sweet, and though small, enough for our purposes. I took care Sambo should not trample it into a bog. Not very far from this little gutter were some caves, partly rock, partly earth. They were quite dry. I chose one about fifteen feet long and five to six feet wide. On the outside, on top, the turf, a rough kind of grass, grew, and a wind-swept tree with two low branches. It looked a likely spot to pitch our camp. I reckoned that by a short cut, striking the main track nearer the township than where I left the road, six hours on horse-back would take me to the place. I examined my stores. I had enough for several days, but if I were staying, there were several things I needed—fishing-lines, if the stores had them, buckets for washing-up and for Sambo and the dogs to drink from, as I must keep the little spring clean, and a few spare shirts, socks, and also some cotton cloth to make into a serang and so save my one and only suit of clothes. After dinner—and I had to imagine I was eating well-hung venison—I had my usual sleep, and then cut down branches, and with leaves and rushes blocked up half the front of the cave as a wind-shelter. I grubbed out an earth oven to one end of the cave, where one could roast or bake. Another grill fire-place I made on the other side of rocks and stones from the beach. In neither case could the smoke or smell of cooking be blown into the cave. Then in front of the open part of the cave I made the camp-fire. Having fed and slept, I rode off first thing in the morning, but struck a nearer township on the river I had crossed, almost on the coast. Thanks to the game of euchre some days back I still had practically the same amount of money I had left Sydney with—about £40. I bought on this occasion a cask of potatoes, a sack of onions, and some vegetable seeds, flour, tinned milk, tinned butter. These I loaded on Sambo and so had to foot it back, a matter of ten hours' tramp.

The next few days I dug up, with the aid of a trowel, some of the turf, and put in the vegetable seeds. The onions and potatoes

I put in a small cave. After another two days I again set out. I had forgotten fishing-tackle. I bought this, and also a kerosene lamp, a hurricane lamp, and as the store-keeper kept a fair amount of poultry, I eventually persuaded him to sell me twelve hens and a cockerel. But I had to pay five pounds for them. They were put into a wooden coop, and this, together with a sack of poultry food, made up Sambo's load.

I wrote a letter to mother, telling her I was well, and left it with the store-keeper to forward at the earliest opportunity. I believe it reached home two months later.

Arriving home, I fed and watered the birds and put them in the potato cave for the night. Next morning I was wakened by the homely cock-a-doodle-do! They soon adapted themselves to their new surroundings, making their roosting-place on the branches of the wind-swept tree above my cave, and in three days I found my first new-laid egg. The only danger was snakes. So having located each nest, and the majority laid in one clump of rushes, I put round the nests plaited horsehair string. No snake will cross over horsehair.* There was plenty of natural food for the fowls—insects, ants, grasshoppers, grubs, oyster-shell for the smashing of it; and so a few handfuls of grain at night was all they cost in food. In return, after a week, I got an average of seven eggs a day. Three weeks after they arrived one hen went broody, and I put thirteen eggs under her. Three weeks later she was trotting about with her baker's dozen. The birds were my early favourites, barred Plymouth Rocks.

My solitude was only broken by fortnightly journeys to the store. I used to start at dawn, reach my destination about midday, stable Sambo, have poor food at the local pub, do my shopping, and after tea and a chat with old Fritz, the storekeeper, and his wife, saddle up and push on back till sunset, when I would unload Sambo and sleep till dawn. In this way I broke the journey and avoided sleeping under a roof. Besides escaping the temptation of cards. There was plenty to occupy one at home. I rose at day-break, put on the billy for tea, had my bathe, accompanied by Parkes, watched by the shivering Nelly, then a scamper along the sands, back to camp, breakfast and then tidy up, cut the day's wood, an hour's fishing and shell-fishing for the larder, pot-shooting for same, then a ride of exploration along the coast and a second

* There are several kinds of venomous snakes, the tiger, the diamond, the black snake, and the whip snake. The latter is quite small and lies on the ground often in a straight line, resembling an old-fashioned lacquer riding whip of black horsehair. The tiger snake is the most ferocious, as it will spring at a man if roused. The carpet snake, which is like a snake squashed flat by a garden roller, is harmless. He will often be found under your pillow or between the blankets. He is, however, very fond of eggs.

bathe soon brought the clock round to midday. Dinner and a snooze and off on Sambo again, or afoot with gun, until it was time to return to camp before sunset. Tea, a pipe, and Shakespeare by lamplight, and so to bed.

I had been living in this glorious freedom for about a month, when one morning I was awakened by Parkes growling. I listened but could hear nothing but the lapping of the waves and the usual sound of bird and insect life getting ready for a new day. He continued growling, so I knew that something out of the ordinary was about. I put my hand over his muzzle to silence him, just as a shadow was thrown across the opening of the cave, and the next moment a face was peering in at me. A child's face.

"Good morning," I call to her. "Good morning," she answers. I get up and slip out into the open to see who and what she is. There she stands, a mere girl-child about ten or twelve years at most, clad only in a faded cotton frock, bareheaded, barefooted. She looked, and was, half-starved. She, too, had run away, a couple of nights ago. She was the daughter of a man and woman travelling from place to place, sly grog-selling. She told her pitiful story whilst I cooked breakfast, the eternal bacon and eggs. She showed me the bruises on her body where she had been knocked about. She was a plain little thing, with curly black hair, and skin sunburnt to a berry. She had slipped away into the bush and made her way in the direction of a small fishing settlement they had visited the day before. The main road in some places is only a few miles from the sea. This she had reached and wandered aimlessly along, having lost her way, until she spied my smouldering fire. For two days she had subsisted on a bag of rough biscuits and water from the small creeks or springs. She was famishing, and wolfed her breakfast, and then curled up to sleep. I left her there, Parkes remaining with her. He looked upon her, I think, as his property. Finding's keeping, he seemed to say, as he looked first at her and then at me, wagging his stump of a tail. He considered himself mighty clever. Nelly, of course, disapproved of her. She disapproved of everything, especially anything feminine. She tolerated me because I was her master, but I think she never forgot she was an aristocrat, with a pedigree reaching back and back.

I went and hooked a few whiting and knocked a few dozen oysters off the rocks. I put whiting and oysters in a little rock-pool where the fish could swim about without losing them. Then I cut the day's supply of wood, had my bathe, and by this time it was lunch- or dinner-time. I picked up the whiting and oysters and back to the cave. The poor waif was still asleep, Parkes's head across her feet. He looked up and wagged his tail. Nelly sat apart

and shivered, hot as it was. I soon had fish and oysters ready for cooking. These, with a brace of rosellas shot the evening before, constituted the menu. The whiting were simmered in salt water, to which was added a little tinned milk and flour, and the oysters popped in the last two minutes. A splendid dish. The parrots split and done spadcock fashion on the grill with bacon to baste them and potatoes and onions which had been in the ashes for some time. Billy tea to wash all down. Perhaps the smell of the cooking wakened her. She gazed round, taking some moments to realize where she was. She had been badly used, for she cringed if one spoke or moved suddenly. She told me her name was Lizzie. She did not know her parents' name other than Mike and Mary. She had never heard of God, except as an oath, but there was precious little she did not know about animal and bird life, and she could swear like a bullock-driver.* She hated washing-up or doing anything about the cave or fires, so I called her Lazy Lizzie. Lazy for short. Me she called Boss. Dinner over, she went to sleep again. She needed it. I had a half-hour's snooze, and then set about preparing a place for Lizzie, as she had evidently come to stay. I cut down some leafy boughs and made a rough partition across the cave with them. Then I made a heap of gum-leaves and threw one of my blankets over the leaves. And a sweeter or healthier bed no one can desire. This done, I sat and smoked and read "The Three Musketeers" till Lazy woke up. I showed her her apartment. "Right, Boss!" was all she said. She wandered off with Parkes on to the sands, and presently she was swimming, accompanied by Parkes. She had gone in frock and all. We had tea, and then I made her turn in. She was soon off, and I also.

A week or so of this life, with good food, soon made a difference in her. On my next excursion to the township, I bought back some cotton frocks and underwear for her. I had told the storekeeper's wife, dear old thing, that I had a young sister stopping with me, and she put up what she thought necessary. Lazy was delighted with them. She only had one fear, that her parents would find her again. Of course, she could neither read nor write and I couldn't be bothered teaching her, but she use to love being told stories. I tried reading Shakespeare to her, but I had to explain the meaning of so many words that the run of the story was lost.

Two months of this life had passed since her arrival, when I

* The bullock-driver in Australia, called "bullocky" for short, guides his team or yoke of bullocks, sometimes twenty-four in number, entirely by his long-handled long-lashed whip and a very generous vocabulary of oaths. He takes a pride in never repeating himself. I believe in some up-country shows where buck-jumping, tree-felling, log-cutting, stock-whip displays are held, and when no females are present, there is also a competition for bullockies, a prize being awarded to the one who can carry on longest with a string of oaths without repetition.

had again to make an excursion to the township. Lazy always hated me going, but I always left Parkes with her, who was most devoted. On arrival, I found Sambo was a little lame, and though I used hot fomentations, he certainly was not in a fit state to travel. So I had to pass the night there. The next day showed but little improvement, so I had to look about me for another nag. There was none to spare in the township, but Fritz told me I might borrow one at David Macdonald's, whose station was off the Sydney Road, some few miles back. So to David I footed it, arriving there like a very sundowner about tea-time. David, I found, was a tall, gaunt, sandy Scot, about sixty, but by no means Scotch in his generosity. When I told him the reason of my visit, to borrow a horse, the old fellow looked at me out of his beady eyes, and quoted from Polonius's advice to Laertes in *Hamlet*. "Neither a borrower nor a lender be."

I replied with "The devil can quote Scripture". He laughed, and bade me sit down to a well-laden tea-table. "So you know your Wullie Shakespeare," he added. For answer I pulled out my tiny edition of the poet's works. He looked at it and, saying: "Aye, aye, I have mine, too," led me into his bedroom, where stood in a case volume upon volume of the plays and sonnets, copiously illustrated. It was too late to trouble about horses, he said. So I stayed the night, discussing Shakespeare with him till late. After bed and breakfast, he led me to the horse paddock. He picked me out a pot-bellied mare. "She be not so good to look at, but she'll carry you, laddie, big as you be, and she's a laster." I do not pretend to reproduce his very broad Scotch, though he had never been in Scotland. He also lent me saddle and bridle. I packed my things and started off for home. I only took a light load, leaving the remainder for another journey, as I was anxious to get back as quickly as possible. Poor Lazy would be getting frightened at my long absence. So I pushed the mare as much as I dared, taking what I guessed would be a short cut. I arrived in sight of the sea just about sunset, and coo-ee'd and whistled as usual. But there came no answering coo-ee or barking. No sign of anyone about. I coo-ee'd again and again, but with no result. I put my hand on to the embers. The fire had not been lit that day. What had happened? I made and lit the fire, and had some tea, and sat long into the night, reading "The Three Musketeers" until I fell asleep.

I awoke at dawn, Nelly at my feet, but no Parkes, no Lazy. This poor little rabbit I looked upon as a baby sister, and she absolutely relied on me for her daily food and well-being. I could not imagine what had happened. Certainly no stranger had been to the camp. Everything was in order. Inaction was no good.

So I mounted the mare and, taking only my water-bottle and a pocket full of dried raisins, made for the township again. Half-way there, another blow. The mare puts her foot in a rabbit-hole and breaks her fetlock. There was only one thing to do. It was a mercy I had my pinfire. It came in handy at last. So for the first time I used it. It was a ghastly business. I hid the saddle and bridle in the undergrowth near-by and continued the journey on foot. Imagine my delight, on nearing the store, to see Parkes. I whistled, and he came scampering towards me, leaping up at me, barking, and wagging his stump all in one. Then out of the store comes Lazy and runs to me. What a relief! Inside the store, after I have had a long shandygaff, I hear her tale. Frightened at being alone so long and in fear that something had happened to me, she had set out as soon as she was awake and discovered I had not arrived. Parkes had trotted on ahead, taking my usual track, and so missed me returning the other way. Parkes had trotted straight to the store, and she limped after him. Well, all's well that ends well. But that decided me. The cost of the dead horse would sadly deplete my capital, which in any case must come to the last pound sooner or later, and I could not cart the poor little devil about the country. So I took old Dutch Fritz and his wife into my confidence. Mrs. Fritz, good old thing, at once suggested that she should adopt Lazy, and to this Fritz readily consented. They had no children, and Lazy had taken to them both. I gave Mrs. Fritz £10 to put in a stocking for the kid. I told them who she was. Fritz knew all about the pair, Mike and Mary. But: "Yah, I don't tink Mike efer show his ugly mug dis vay again," said Fritz. "Last time him coom here, Dave Macdonald shoot 'im up 'is behind vith saltpetre." Again, I do not attempt to reproduce the Dutch accent of Fritz in phonetic writing.

I decided I would strike away from the coast. But first there was David Macdonald to be settled with. I recovered the saddle and bridle two days later. The ants had left nothing but the white bones of the mare, which I dragged into the scrub. Then I rode Sambo, who was sound again, to David Macdonald. As soon as he saw the saddle and bridle, he knew. "Ah, well, accidents will happen, laddie." On my asking him what I owed him, he looked at me, and answered: "A week's stay with me here. I want to discuss *Macbeth* with you." I accepted his hospitality, first telling him my real name. "Aye, old Tom Asche, he's verra strong, but he takes too much of yon"—pointing to a bottle of whisky. I laughed, and admitted the old man's weakness. "But you've never seen him drunk," I challenged. "Maybe I've never seen him sober. He's always the same. But twenty nobblers of whisky before breakfast," he added, "is too much for any

man." "Well, I never saw him drunk," I replied. And I never did.

Macdonald was very interesting company, to me at any rate. He had seen the great G. V. Brooke, Montgomery, and Harry Sullivan. The latter a ranter, and no brains, was his criticism. Brooke was his god of actors, especially as Othello. During my week's stay I recited many passages of Othello to him, and he used to criticize and correct me. "You ought to go on the stage, laddie," he said one night, after we had been discussing *Macbeth*. And I think his words had more weight on my eventual decision than anything else. A year or so later, he was in Sydney when I gave an amateur performance of Othello. He saw me, and he had a conversation with the old man and mother afterwards. I think I have to thank him for much.

After saying good-bye to him, I rode back to my estate by the sea. There I stayed a couple of days, but the place seemed lonely, and the wanderlust was on me again. There were several broods of chicks now, of various ages. I left these behind for old Fritz to collect later on, and after a final farewell swim in the sea one morning, I rode off, after a final breakfast of eggs and oysters.

I was sorry to say good-bye to what I felt was my absolutely own home. I had made everything so comfortable, and the life was so free and healthy. But I was doing no good there. One could entertain no ambition there, no means of fulfilling it.

And there were two things I longed to do, and they were strangely apart.

I had seen a lot of acting, and I longed to become an actor and make my name known. And I had seen some coursing and loved the sport, and I wanted to own a greyhound who would win the highest honours.

I used at night to stand and recite long speeches from Shakespeare to the sea, and imagine that the breaking of the waves upon the beach was the applause of countless thousands of my audience. And I used to rub Nelly down after she had pulled down a hare, that I was grooming the winner of a Waterloo Cup.

I turned, and had a last look at that wonderful bay. Was it the last? I don't know. Many years after, the Hon. Hugh D. Mackintosh motored a party of us over from Sydney to Jervis Bay, near by that white elephant of Australian Government—Canberra. There was the same turquoise sea, the same white sand, and the trees and vegetation growing down to the water's edge. It was not the same spot where I had struck it more than thirty years ago. And I did not search along the beach for the old cave, in case I should find it. That would only make one feel so old.

Back at the old store, I gave my name and address in Sydney



(Photograph by Histed)

AS PETRUCHIO IN "THE TAMING OF THE SHREW"

(Facing page 38)

to Fritz, and he promised to write me occasionally and let me know how the kid was getting on. She, of course, cried when she realized I was going, but I told her I would be coming back, and left Parkes for her to take care of until I returned. The two were firm friends. So off I went, and I never returned. From time to time I got a quaint letter, weeks old, from Fritz, telling me how the girl was going on, and I used to answer them. But, like all correspondence, it gradually ceased. Eight years later, however, my mother forwarded me on to London a letter from old Mrs. Fritz, telling me Fritz was dead. Lazy had married a successful young squatter, and she, Mrs. Fritz, was housekeeping for them.

CHAPTER THREE

Further Wanderings in the Bush, and to Fiji

AFTER leaving the store, I again visited David Macdonald. He offered me a post as manager under him, as he said he was getting ancient, but I did not want to settle down. I struck inland. Eventually I landed up, after many days' monotonous travelling with a scarcity of water, at a shepherd's hut. The hutter told me that shearing was in full swing at the home station, about twenty miles on. Having reached the homestead, I made myself known to the owner, Mr. King I shall call him. That was not his name, but on account of certain tragic happenings in the family later, I suppress his real name. His son Reg had been my senior at the Melbourne Grammar, and Mr. and Mrs. King made me at home at once.

Eventually I remained as a "jackeroo", a name usually given to an apprentice who gives his services in return for his board and keep in order to gain experience. I had never seen shearing in progress before. Shearers in those days were paid, I think, 17s. 6d. per hundred sheep shorn. An ordinary man—this before shearing by machinery came in, could do his hundred a day, the ringer, or champion, up to 170. From their weekly wage was deducted 10s. a week for board, etc. This consisted of four pounds of mutton per head per day, flour, tea, sugar, a bunk, the man finding his own blankets, and fodder for two horses. Nowadays, I believe, they are paid £2 10s. to £3 a hundred. The shearers ride from station to station in American motors, and each fit-up travels a *chef* to do their cooking. He is paid £10 a week, and all found. At least, so my brother Fritz informed me in 1922.

In the old days, at the end of the cutting out, there would be a race-meeting for the shearers' horses, and so on to the next station. Shearing is spread over a good many months, according to the latitude, some shearing earlier than others. At the end of the cut-out the shearers used to be paid by cheque, which cheque many of them would at once proceed to drink at the nearest bush shanty pub, where the vilest of vile spirits only was sold. Planking down your cheque, it was called.

It was at this station I got into a heated argument because I happened to make a statement about the world being round.

That got a good laugh, and as I persisted in the truth of the statement, a big bully of a man challenged me to fight on it. He was older and perhaps tougher, but not within two stone of my weight, and having been well taught in the use of my hands, I took him on. So off with our coats and shirts, and at it with the raw 'uns. Of course, he rushed, and I rocked him from side to side with straight lefts and swinging rights, and soon had him on the ground, without a scratch in return. "How's the world now, Tim?" a wag shouted as he came to. "Well, it's going b——y well round now," replied Tim. We were quite good pals after.

After a couple of months here, I decided to leave. Mr. King used to have terrible drinking bouts, when he would be overbearing to his womenfolk. His son Reg, my school chum, had gone home to Oxford, so there was no one to interfere. I could not very well do so, in the position I occupied in the house. I had to pretend I noticed nothing. Several months after I left he committed suicide.

I was now heading north again. I gave Sydney a wide berth, and crossed into a cattle station where my brother was, having deserted plumbing for the country again. Cattle are certainly more interesting than sheep. One night we rode in with some other of the men for a bit of a spree at the nearest township. We found a small travelling circus had pitched its tent just off the one and only street. The circus consisted of jugglers, acrobats, boxers, and a couple of painted-up women who rode phlegmatic-looking horses round and round, jumping from their backs through paper hoops, etc. It was sale day in the township, and, of course, everyone went to the circus in the evening. I suppose the audience numbered about 200, at half a dollar a head. It was a pitiful show, but everyone seemed to enjoy it. When the ugly mugged pug threw out his challenge of £5 to anyone who would stay with him for three rounds, my brother Bill egged me on to accept. As my purse was getting very low, and as I stood to lose nothing, I consented, on condition that five golden sovereigns were held by a stake-holder. No notes. This was agreed to. So I stripped to the waist. The pug was in black tights and an emerald-green vest. The gloves that were offered, as well as the ones the challenger had on were in such a foul condition that I suggested bare knuckles. I did not want any blood-poisoning. I wasn't going to have those evil-smelling things pushed into my face. The pug was nothing loath.

Well, I got a bit of a mouse on one eye, but by the end of the third round I had cut him up pretty badly and floored him with one over the heart. Anyhow, I got my five pounds. I only relate the incident to show that I was having a good ground-preparation

for the theatrical profession, wherein one has to receive and give good knocks.

I had now a very unpleasant experience. The men had been out after dingoes (Australian wild dog), riding them down and cutting them to pieces, by means of a copper wire attached to the crackers of their stock-whips. A stock-whip is anything from 16 ft. upward, according to the skill of the user. In places, according to balance, the plaited lash is as thick as a man's wrist. When cracked it sounds like a sharp gun. I have seen a man with a twenty-four foot whip, the handle or butt is only about a foot long, pick up a threepenny bit from the ground at full length or at half distance. There was a performer on the London music-halls who did wonderful tricks with the stock-whip. I think his name was Lindsay.

I was practising with one of these men's whips, and flicked my wrist with the copper wire. I thought nothing of it at the time, but soon it began to get inflamed and my hand and arm swelled up. I got a bit funky about it. So did the men. The nearest doctor was about ten miles away. So off we rode to him. When we got to his shanty he was in a beautiful state of intoxication. He looked at my hand, and said it must come off at once. Whilst he was blundering about, looking for his instruments—there was no question of an anæsthetic—I got out of the place, and, disregarding the men's protests, I galloped off. I could not stomach the idea of being maimed. Now at the out-station there was an old black gin, * Queen Biddy, who used to smoke her clay pipe on the veranda mostly all day. She saw my badly-swollen arm and hand as I hitched up the horse. She mumbled something or other, and told me to wait. In about half an hour she returned with some weeds and leaves, which she stewed in a billy over the hut fire, and this steaming mess she spread over the spot where the wire had clipped me. She continued doing this, and eventually succeeded in drawing out all the poison, and in two weeks my hand and arm were all right again. I remember seeing another old black gin at Blayney's vineyard, Nagambie. She had got a grass seed into her ear, and this had germinated, and the whole of her face was swollen. There she would sit, smoking a pipe and jamming a sharp wooden skewer into the ear to crush the sprouting seed. This she accomplished, but the pain she must have endured! But these aborigines seem impervious to pain. On a march, a black gin, if she gives birth to a child, is only allowed half an hour's halt. Then she must continue her march with the rest. The Australian black is very low down in the scale. He has wonderful instinct, but no brain. For instance, he

* A woman who has been married, abbreviation of aborigine; a young unmarried girl is called a Lubra.

is used, or was used until quite recently, by the police to track down bush murderers and other criminals. The black tracker, as he is called, would follow a man's track over the hardest ground, although days old, and at a run by the side of the mounted trooper. Nothing but a fall of rain will stop him, or when cattle or sheep in numbers have crossed the track. Nearly always he tracks the culprit to the end.

But if this same blood-tracker in his wild state were to find one of his relatives murdered, instead of looking for the track of the murderer and following it, he walks in the direction where the murdered man's right index finger is pointing, and the first being he meets in that line is *ipso facto*, the murderer, and pays the penalty. With the kidney-fat of his victim rubbed over his face, the avenger goes off perfectly satisfied.

There is another gift the Australian black has, and that is his ability to transmit news from one end of the bush to the other, through hundreds of miles of wild country. It was called the bush telegraph. In this way the bushrangers, who could always rely on the blacks to be on their side, would receive news of any movement of the police hundreds of miles away. I do not believe anyone has ever fathomed his secret. Some have said it is done by tapping on trees a kind of Morse signal; others that he transmits the signs through the ground. Some system of this kind is carried on in English prisons, convicts being able to communicate news from one cell to another. In this way the Kelly Gang, Captain Morgan, and other bushrangers, were always well acquainted of their pursuers' whereabouts. If friendly-inclined, the aborigines can be very useful to one.

Of all bushrangers I suppose Captain Morgan was the most dreaded. He was absolutely and senselessly cruel. He worked single-handed. They said he slept with his eyes open. He shot one man dead who, imagining he was asleep, tried to make him prisoner. There are many tales of his cruelty. One old woman, against whom he had a grievance, he tied to a log over an ant-hill, and she was eaten alive. Another man he tied to a tree facing the sun and then cut his upper eyelids off. The man was found blind and raving mad. He was eventually caught through a piece of unexplainable oversight on his part. He arrived at a certain station homestead one evening and held them all up. He ordered every living soul, servants and all, into the one big dining-room. There he demanded food and drink and made the wife of the manager play the piano and sing to him. This went on hour after hour, all sitting round the walls not daring to move. At last he went to sleep, revolver in hand, but at the slightest movement or noise he was awake and threatening with his revolver. At last the morning

broke. Now it so happened that one of the maids whom he had seen when he arrived had hidden herself, and when she found he had not missed her, she set out walking to the nearest neighbour with the news that Morgan was at—I forget the name of the station. Word was sent out, and the following morning before daylight the homestead was surrounded by about forty armed men, a few policemen (mounted troopers) and station hands, others who had volunteered. Now comes the most remarkable part of the story. Morgan went out on the veranda with the rest of the household, and the maid who had been absent all night served him with coffee which he had asked for. And he never noticed her. And she also walked off the veranda and served coffee to a man who was hiding behind a tree. And Morgan never noticed it. Having finished his coffee, he told the boss he wanted a fresh horse. So off they all moved to the horse paddock the household in front and Morgan in the rear.

They all knew what to expect. As soon as he was mounted and riding away, he would empty his revolver into the crowd out of pure devilment. They had noticed the return of the maid after her absence of the night, and they had noticed her serving coffee to the man behind the tree. So they were full of hopes and fears as they walked.

Then a shot rang out from behind the tree and Morgan fell. But as the besiegers rushed at him he laid two of them low. He was dead, and they mutilated him. At any rate, a purse was made out of a certain part of his anatomy, just as we used to make one from an old man kangaroo. And that was the end of Morgan.

After some time of life here, I began to get very bored with everything. Poor Will, who had very little brains, was quite satisfied with the life. He was a good horseman, and that is about all. But I longed to get away from it. I felt "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined". I made up my mind to return home. There was neither fame nor fortune to be won here. I said "So long" to my brother, and started for Sydney.

Nothing of any interest occurred on the journey, although it was a glorious life, but everything seemed flat after my home by the sea. Only one amusing thing happened. It was somewhere south, near the borders of Queensland and New South Wales, near the Darling or Barwin river, I came upon some men putting up a post and rail fence. I stopped and had tea with them, and was able to give them a plug or two of tobacco, of which they were short. Then one of them asked: "What had won the Melbourne Cup?" Now the Melbourne Cup is run the first Tuesday in November. It was now the middle of May. For a moment I could not remember. Then I bethought me of an old *Australasian* my brother Will had

given me, the first paper I had seen for ages. Perhaps that would supply the information. I unearthed it from my swag and turned to the racing. It was a January date. There was no mention of the Melbourne Cup, except that the owner of the ticket in the Tattersall Sweep, which drew the second horse in that race, had not yet claimed. It gave the number of the ticket. This I read out. The man who had made the inquiry undid his body-belt and from one of the pockets was drawn an envelope and out of the envelope a Tatt's Sweep ticket. "What number, mate?" I read it out carefully. "That's all right! That's me!" And it was!

I can't remember exactly what the second horse ticket was worth. The first, I know, used to be £45,000. The Sweep was 100,000 tickets at £1 each. I think the second was worth from £10,000 to £20,000. Whatever it was, he had won it. He insisted that his mates, three in number, and myself, should all start for Sydney together. He would stand the racket. But two of the men decided to work on. For my part, I was riding on alone. They were for the nearest rail, goodness knows how many miles away. Before parting, however, I gave the man my father's address as being the best place to stay at, telling him the old man would put him right as regards claiming and banking the money. So we parted. When I eventually reached home, I found he had been and gone. "And a nice job you gave me, my Oscar," said my father.

It appeared my father went with him, drew the money, and opened an account for him in his own bank. But the poor fellow could not grasp the fact that by writing a cheque and signing it he could draw the value in cash or goods. To prove it, he had gone round ordering kitchen grates as being the most substantial things he could think of. He had written cheques for these to the amount of several hundred pounds, and all the grates had been delivered to his room at my father's hotel, until his room and the adjacent passages were blocked with his purchases. This naturally led to a row with the old man, until mother, as usual, stepped in as peacemaker. However, the man, who was from the north of Scotland, by the way, had by now been convinced of the value of his signature. He gave his pal who had accompanied him a couple of hundred pounds, and left me a gold watch the size of a turnip and a gold Albert like a young anchor-chain. He had booked his passage home, steerage.

Tattersall's Sweeps were started, I believe, by a man called Adams. The big sweep on the Melbourne Cup was 100,000 tickets at £1 each, the winner £50,000 less 10% to Adams.

One year it was won by a barmaid at Beech's Hotel, kept by William Beech, champion oarsman of the world. By the way,

I was at Randwick race-course on the first occasion Beech beat Hanlon, who was looked upon as unbeatable. When the news was posted up that Beech had won, the bookies offered to bet 2 to 1 against it being correct. Another time, twenty Chinamen had put in a bob each, and won the big prize. Eventually it was made illegal, and the organization was driven at last to take up its abode in Tasmania, who legalized it on condition that so much was paid in percentage to the Tasmanian Government. But according to the Commonwealth it was illegal, and no letters from the mainland could be delivered to that address. However, evasion was easy, one way and another. Sweeps of different size were got up on nearly every race. Now the winner of any prize has to pay income-tax to the Commonwealth Government on money thus won, and to collect this money the Commonwealth have appointed Tattersall's its agent. Quite Gilbertian!

Moreover, owing to the tremendous demand for money orders to the value of 5s. 6d., which is the standard price of Tattersall's tickets nowadays, the Post Office, in order to obviate sticking sixpenny stamps on a five-shilling order, issued a five-and-sixpenny order solely for the purchase of these illegal tickets. Now, that is quite American!

But Australian politicians, or rather, the majority of them, were never celebrated for either a sense of humour or honesty. More of their funniosities later.

I had a great welcome home, mother all tears and laughter, and father uncertain whether to embrace or thrash me. A few days at home—we had a private house now at Elizabeth Bay—and I was bored stiff. I studied under a coach, a Mr. Kinlock, for what reason I do not know. I played football for the old Waratah Club, continued my boxing-lessons at old Larry Foley's, where I sparred with Peter Jackson, Slavin, and others; and at night I went to the theatre. Then I started private theatricals at home, assisted by friends and family. I played scenes from *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Timon of Athens*. I also painted the scenery, with the aid of my school pal, Goyder, and my old governess, a Miss Tye, made the costumes. Bless her!

I left off my studies and father put me into a wine-and-spirit merchant's office, copying letters, doing custom-house business, at 10s. a week. This, after having been my own boss and lord of all I surveyed. The confines of a dingy office after the vastness and freedom of the bush! I had been obliged to sell Sambo and the saddle, owing to betting losses. But with their sale my luck turned, and I made on the average £5 a week out of the books and shop totes.

The first week's wages of 10s. I tossed carelessly over my desk

to a newsman who happened to come into the office. For this piece of swank I was reported to the old man, who, for a wonder, only reprimanded me. The end came some months later. I had scraped enough money together to give a public performance of *Othello*. This was quite successful financially and otherwise, and I received most encouraging notices in the Press. The next payday at the wine-and-spirit merchant's, the head boss happened to be present when I did my usual stunt of parting with my ten bob wages to the first mendicant that entered. He at once gave me a piece of his mind, in return for which I threatened to pull his nose, and told him he could put the ten bob in future where the monkey is supposed to put his nuts. I walked out then for good.

Well, the old man had to be faced. He was well over sixty now and had a binge (Australian for stomach), but he was as strong in the arm as ever, and his temper had not improved. I had not gone straight to the hotel, but had stopped on the way for a port, and to bring matters to a head, I walked into his presence *smoking a cigarette*. I knew he would have heard of my conduct. This had made him boil. But a cigarette in my mouth! Ye Gods! By Creation!—and round came his arm. I blocked it with my left, and it hurt, hard as I was. At the same time I flicked him gently with my fingers on his bearded jaw, and jumped back and got the good old table between us. There was nothing he could throw. He could only glare. "By Creation! You strike *me*!" he yelled.

"No," I replied. "Just touched you, to show what I could do. If I wanted to, I could knock you out in a second. I'm no longer a child for you to smack." But I knew very well, if he got his hands on me I should still be a very good imitation of a child. Only two years previously he had exhibited his strength to some of his old mining cronies, by holding me up by my waist-belt with one hand above his head. And I weighed a good 180 lbs., stripped. But as he would not argue, I manœuvred to the window and hopped it. Having collected some clothes and the faithful but disapprovingly Nelly from our house at Elizabeth Bay, I left word with my sisters and their governess, a Miss Tye, that I was off again for a while.

I went round to Petty's Hotel, where a friend, Dick —, was staying. He was several years my senior, a plantation-owner in the South Sea Islands. He used to visit Sydney for a spree for one month every two years, and spend all his two years' income in that one month. He was off to Fiji the following day, and I planned going with him. I had something over forty pounds in my "kick". I paid twenty of them for my passage there and back, Dick jumping at my idea of going with him. I was to share

his cabin. The twenty pounds included no grub. Dick had laid in a large and assorted stock of food and drink. This I was to share in return for my services as cook. We passed through the heads the following morning in our 20-ton windjammer. A sunny day and a fresh breeze. The craft was a regular trader to the Solomon, Ellis and Fiji group in copra, shell, bananas, coco-nuts and other fruits. It was a quick, uneventful voyage. Our staple diet had been live chicken, roast, stewed, curried, grilled, fricassee'd, and tinned meats. The crew were mostly Kanaks, with an Italian as skipper, who used to trade his spaghetti with us for our chicken.

We reached Suva. Here we landed, as Dick had his yacht to sail us over to his particular patch of palms and plantains, about twenty-five miles away from Ziti Levu. The schooner was to pick me up on its return. A most affectionate greeting awaited Dick from his six frizzy-haired wives, all very much alike. Reminded me rather of the ten little nigger-boys nursery-rhyme. Orders were given for a feast in my honour the following evening, or was it two evenings hence? As most Fijian cooking is by slow process underground, the preparation takes some time.

Those glorious islands! The wondrous sleepy beauty of them! I think I got my love of colour there. Colour absolutely alive. Bronze skins clad in orange, green, saffron, blue, sliding along coral pathways under giant verdant palms against azure seas and skies. And, beyond the white surf and the rollers breaking on the reef, the islanders manipulating their outrigger canoes, sailing through the gap and up to the yellow sands. And that night I gazed upon the most enchanting moonlight scene I have ever seen on stage or off. Dick had done me well. I had the guest's house, or hut, well-matted, with European bed, and in great hospitality he had offered me any one or more of his wives. But I would not rob him. I slept the sleep of the pure and just.

Next day, one loafed down in pyjamas to the beach and surf-bathed. The wives brought fire and utensils to the waterside, with luscious fruit and tea and dainty scones and cakes by no means native in their origin. There one basked in the morning sun, sometimes rousing up to bathe again, or ride in on the surf-boats, or fish out by the reef, all the while tended on by the wives or servants. Dick just slept and lazed. So we passed the time until my feast-night. Dick, myself and three of his white friends made up the party. Then, dug out of the ground and served on leaves and carved wooden platters, sometimes in polished turtle shells, steaming shell-fish, crayfish, crabs, fish of many hues, turtle flesh, shark fins, sucking-pigs, chickens, ducks, yams, sweet potatoes, a kind of turkey, and kid. Then there were French bread and

imported butter, and all kinds of tropical fruit, the finest champagne from Dick's latest cargo, coffee, liqueurs and cigars. Surely it was this feast which gave me the cue for Abdullah's opening song in Chu Chin Chow :

Here be oysters stewed in honey—etc.

During coffee and cigars we witnessed a fearsome war-dance by a couple of score or so of men strangely costumed and painted. This is called, if my memory serves, a *méke*. This was followed by a line dance by swaying female bodies decorated with flowers and leaves, and these young goddesses would, at a look, slide out and recline by your side and chant low and sweetly in your ear words foreign in sound but universal in meaning. Then the moon rose above the palms, and in moonlight anything is possible. One slept far into the morning, but wakened without a head, for everything had been of the best.

So day followed day and night, night. Fortunately I had Nelly for a chaperon. Calm and friendly though these natives were, they could on occasion be as fierce and cruel as the tropical storms which often swept their islands. In some islands, the Solomons, for example, cannibalism was still practised. And though "long pig", as the human fare was called, had given way to "short pig", the porker, there were still many living who had indulged in it. And to these islands had come the old pirates, raiding and ravishing and hiding their blood-gotten treasure. Here still came blackbirders, men who enticed the native on board their craft and "shanghaied" them for Queensland plantations. My brother had been one of the crew on such an expedition.

The native is indolent and unthrifty. Not so the Chinese, who even then were increasing in number and power, always at work, ever saving, but ever gambling. I spent a most peaceful and pleasant time there. Fishing, surfing and cock-fighting, of which the islanders were very fond, and swimming, at which they excel. Though a good swimmer myself, above the average, I could not live with these brown sliding bodies who seemed to eel their way through the water. From these islanders I believe has come the great advance in modern swimming. The trudgeon and the crawl with its many variations owe much to the islanders' natural stroke. And their shark-infested waters have no terror for them. Dick staged an exhibition for me. Pig-flesh and offal were thrown into the water and Master Shark was soon busy in scores. Into this water plunged the islanders, with knife in hand or mouth, and they would rip up the white-bellied monster till they had, as Macbeth put it, succeeded in "making the green one red". It is said sharks do not touch dark-coloured bodies, but I have seen a black retriever

dog pulled down in Sydney harbour ; and yet there is an instance—I think it was off Newcastle, N.S.W.—when, of four men swimming ashore from an overturned sailing-boat, the sharks pulled down three of the four dressed in white flannels, but did not touch the fourth, who was in blue serge. Apropos of this, there was a nigger boxer in Australia, Starlight, I think it was, who was told it was quite safe for him to swim in the harbour. "Sharks don't go for black men," he was told. "Might be my bad luck to meet a blind one," said Starlight. I shall never forget those islands. I have often longed to produce a play with such a setting. But one would have to import the island dancers and singers and all. Could it be done? I suppose so, but wouldn't they, the islanders, hate it! No wonder Robert Louis Stevenson made Samoa his home! If one wanted to lead an absolutely idle life of dreaming there are scores of spots here to make one's bed. In the Fiji group alone there are over two hundred islands of which something like fifty or sixty were inhabited. Some of the groups of islands, especially the Solomon group, were not exactly safe to visit owing to cannibalism still being practised. Cannibals do not eat "long pork" because they are short of animal food but in order to possess the courage of those they devour. For example, a man like Peter Jackson or John L. Sullivan would have been greatly in demand. Some of the half-caste women are really beautiful and most attractive. And some of the quadroons are as fair-skinned as a Spaniard. One can buy a wife there for about a dozen pigs, but those with white blood in their veins do not make as good housewives as the pure-blooded Islander. When I was there the women bathed indiscriminately with the men, but it took a stranger some little time to grow accustomed to half a dozen naked young women accompanying you in your swim.

After several weeks, the schooner came for me, and I said good-bye to Dick and his wives. Perhaps he is still over there, a man of sixty-five by now. I drink to him wherever he be.

Once more Sydney Harbour, and once more Circular Quay. As we step ashore, Nelly wags her tail for the first time since we sailed away. Up to the Royal Hotel. Again I get a warm welcome. Father had changed his mind. I think he had realized I had set my heart on the stage, and I think my old friend David had persuaded them. But he would not let me go on in Australia. I must perforce go home, to *his* home, Norway, to study. Now it happened there was a Norwegian boat in the harbour, and father had, as usual, made friends with the Norwegian skipper, Hougé. Father always visited any Norwegian ship that came in, and offered hospitality to officers and crew. In return he would be delighted to obtain any special Norwegian dainty, either in food or drink.

On one occasion, he had brought home a great prize, a 2-lb. piece of *gammelost*, which means old cheese. He brought it to the hotel in secret and hid it away in the larder where no one would think of finding it. Then daily, whilst mother was elsewhere employed, he would go and help himself to a piece on a biscuit and hide it again. A few days after its arrival, mother began to complain about the awful smell in the larder. She could not trace its source. She called father in. He never could smell anything. Quite innocently he said he could not account for it. I suggested it was a dead rat under the floor. So the carpenter was sent for to pull up the flooring. Then mother and a maid started moving the edibles which might be affected by the ensuing dust. Father, fearing his treasure-trove would be discovered, boldly removed the tins of canned food that hid his cheese, and put it in his pocket. Mother's back was turned, but I saw it. As the old fellow passed by her to leave the larder, she got a strong waft of it, for she cried: "Do you mean to say, Tom, you can smell nothing now?" "Nothing at all," he answered, as he passed out of the door. I watched mother directing the carpenter for a few moments, then I went into the parlour where I knew the old man had gone. He was there, and just pulled his hand away from his pocket. He looked at me like a guilty schoolboy. "Phew! it's worse in here," I said. "Vot is?" "That dead stench." He passed by me into the bar. He smelt very dreadful as he passed me. I could not guess what it was. I was never allowed in the bar, but I looked through the swing-door. I saw father approach two old customers and friends having their morning nobbler. He joined them. I noticed they stopped talking, looked at each other, then at the old man. They gulped their whisky down and left abruptly. As they passed me, one exclaimed: "B——y awful!" Father beckoned to the barmaid for a plate and knife. He helped himself from the side table to biscuits and butter, then from his pocket he took a paper parcel which he put on the counter and opened. I saw the barmaid step back and put her handkerchief to her nose. Father proceeded to put a piece from the parcel on the buttered biscuit. Then I tumbled. It was cheese. I went to mother and explained. She swept into the bar, faced father, and pointed at the offending cheese. He tried, poor old fellow, to defend it. To him it was a piece of his old fatherland. Whatever it might smell like to others, it brought to him the perfumed memory of a Norwegian farm and of his youth. But mother had no such sentiment. The offending cheese was picked up with a newspaper, and mother swept out of the bar. Poor father settled down to another nobbler of whisky.

But to return to Captain Houge. He was invited to dinner

and matters were discussed. Yes, he would take me to Norway for £40 passage money, all found. He was sailing in a week with a cargo of wool. A friend of ours, Gotaas, another Norwegian, was going on the same boat. She could only accommodate four passengers, So it was fixed up. My mother got my things together, whilst I paid a hurried visit to Nagambie, where my two sisters and young brother were spending a holiday at a vineyard belonging to old Tom Blayney. On my return to Sydney, I had to find a home for Nelly. She had been my constant companion for some years now, always sleeping on my bed in civilization, and at my feet in the wilds. She was a quaint bitch, devoted to me, but always disapproving. She just tolerated my doings because I was her master. Only in one other instance have I known such devotion in a dog. Also a greyhound bitch. However, I gave Nelly to a friend who I knew would look after her for my sake. But she fretted herself to death within two weeks of my departure. Many years later, in 1913, I met her reincarnation. But of that later.

At last came the last night at home, and the farewells. The old tramp—as a matter of fact, she was a brand new Belfast-built steamer of 4,500 tons—lay in Rosebay and was due to sail at dawn. She had a terrible name, *Herman Wiedal Jarlsberg*. I had to be on board at ten the night before. Mother was seeing me off. I went to say good-bye to father. He was sitting on his chair before the office desk, the old white topper, the long Viking beard, now white, and the tears rolling down his cheeks. I held out my hand to him. It was the first time I had ever done so, because of his grip. I always, hitherto, had put my hand on his shoulder in taking leave. He grasped my hand and pulled me down to him and kissed me on the lips, for the first time, I think, since I was a toddler. Then he pushed me away. "Go, my son, Oscar!" he said, and the old white top-hat sank lower and lower, until his face was buried in his great hands, and I heard the old man sob. I wanted to put my hand on his shoulder. But I believe he would have struck me had I done so. Mother, at the door, motioned me to leave. I did. At the street door I looked back. He was still in the same position. I never saw him again. But his farewell kiss I felt for years, the touch of his lips, and the scrape of his beard.

Mother and I went aboard, and she fussed about my cabin like a dear old hen. I had the cabin all to myself, and she had filled it with all sorts of comforts. Trust a mother! I kissed good-bye, and watched the little boat disappear into the darkness, until only her waving handkerchief was visible. Then I went to my cabin and, I am not ashamed to confess it, I broke down. I was leaving home, and all that were dear to me, to seek fame and fortune in a strange country. Twenty years later, I returned, having won both.

CHAPTER FOUR

I Sail for Norway ;

I WAS on deck in my pyjamas at daybreak as the anchor was weighed. It was Tuesday, the 2nd February. My fate day. It has always been a Tuesday in February that has decided my fate. The commander, Houge, was on the bridge with the pilot. I looked round the harbour. It *was* our beautiful harbour in those days, before the jerry-builder began his vile work of despoiling. The screw revolved, and we moved. I took a last look behind me, wondering if I should ever see it again. Then we passed through the heads, dropped the pilot, and made south at about ten knots an hour, our best speed. It was a hot day, but a heavy sea, though it did not affect me. There were three other passengers aboard. The Consul for Norway and Sweden, of Sydney, his wife, and the Norwegian friend of ours, Ole Gotaas. He was on his way home to Christiania after several years in Australia. All three were seasick and did not appear for a couple of days. I had the deck alone. The Captain's cabin was our dining-saloon and our lounge and smoking-room. It was small but comfy. My state-room was roomy, even for a liner.

The sea air had given me an appetite, and I was longing for breakfast. Presently the Captain came off the bridge. It was eight bells. He was a fine, handsome man about forty-five.

"Hello, kid! I've got bad news for you. We have no cook. Slipped ashore last night. Could not wait to pick up another. What about you making up some breakfast for us? Can you cook?"

I admitted I could. "Then we'll sign you on as cook. The crew will have to elect one for themselves."

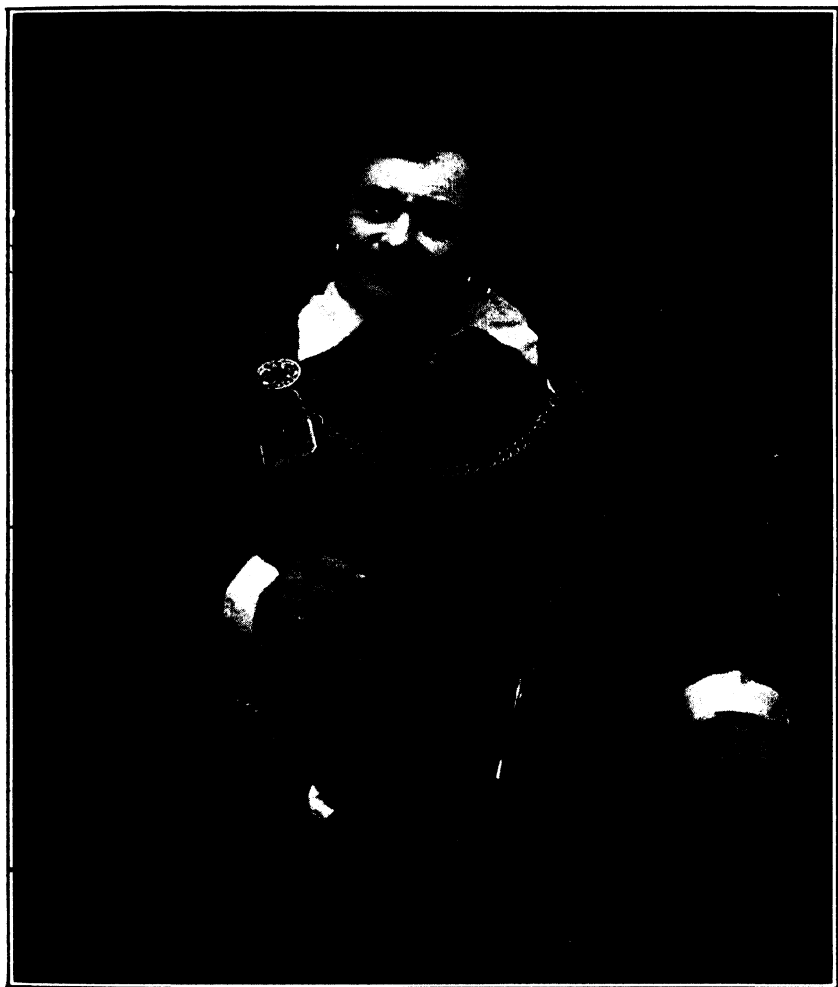
So the Captain's steward was called, and I was introduced to the pots and pans of the galley. I soon had a heaped-up dish of grilled ham and poached eggs and coffee. The ham was very salt. I had tasted a bit before cooking. So I sprinkled soft sugar on it as it grilled. This extracted the salt and made the ham quite sweet and nutty. Anyhow, the Captain congratulated me on the breakfast, and so did Gotaas who had his in bed. The Consul and his wife would only have tea and toast.

Now I was not going to cook every meal for our lot, or I should

have a rotten voyage of it. So I looked about for a suitable man. There was a Jamaican black on the crew signed on at Sydney in place of a Swede who had bunked it. I have always found that coloured men know something about cooking. Joe, as he was called, was delighted at the prospect of a more comfortable job. I found out the extent of his cooking knowledge, which was not much, but under my tuition he was soon able to cook eggs and bacon, vegetables, potatoes. Anyhow, he did all the washing-up and rough work, all the preparatory stuff. The crew's food did not call for much culinary knowledge: Salt junk, soups and ship's biscuits and potatoes. Unknown to the Captain, however, I used to give them a treat occasionally in the way of fresh meat. Now the Captain was, like most Norsemen, somewhat of a *gourmet*, and being part-owner of the vessel, could, and did, look after his personal wants. Moreover, each of the four passengers was paying £40 a head for fares, all of which went into his own pocket. There was no refrigerator on board, so what meat we carried outside salt stuff was alive. I went through the live stores. There was one cow in full milk, and I had to milk her, thanks to the vanished cook, for old Houge hated tinned milk in his coffee; twenty-four sheep, four young porkers about three months old, something like a hundred head of poultry, and several hutches of rabbits. Then in a corrugated-iron tank filled with running seawater a couple of dozen Australian crayfish and, to cap all, another tank with hundreds and hundreds of Stewart Island oysters from New Zealand. Now all this livestock had to be fed and cared for, and all this was the cook's duty. No wonder the poor blighter—he had signed on at Melbourne on the outward voyage—had done a bunk. His predecessor, a Norwegian, had set him the example as soon as the tramp had arrived there.

I went to the Captain. "What is the menagerie for, Captain?" I asked. "Would you prefer salt junk?" he replied. "How long is this voyage for, Captain?" "We do not touch land till we reach Port Tewfik, the Suez Canal, about thirty to forty days," he answered. "Well, you must tell me off a man to see to the feeding and cleaning of their quarters." And he told me to pick anyone I liked.

I found a young Norwegian sailor who came from peasant stock and was able and willing to do work, which reminded him of home. Dalgety & Co., had, I believe, supplied all live stock and food, and had done their part of the contract well. The poultry were a mixed lot and overcrowded, all in fattening coops. So I picked out a dozen or more of the likeliest-looking hens, some of my favourite Plymouth Rocks among them, and them I gave a run and roosting house to themselves. These hens averaged for the



[Photograph by Histed

AS PETRUCHIO IN "THE TAMING OF THE SHREW"

[Facing page 54

whole voyage, once they started laying, seven eggs a day. The rest of the poultry, including two dozen ducks, I put in coops where they had room for exercise, and kept the fattening coops filled as required. I insisted on absolute cleanliness and disinfection. And I must say, Hansen, the farmhand of the ship, did his work well. During the whole voyage there was only one death, by accident or Nature, one of the pigs injuring his back and having to be destroyed. But he was not wasted. The first time I wanted a sheep killed I asked Hansen if he could do it and skin and clean it. He answered in the affirmative. About an hour later I was up on the Captain's bridge. And down below four sailormen were skinning poor Mr. Sheep. They had laid the carcass on a kind of form or table and were all at work bit by bit, of course the carcass was almost cold by now. I did not like to make any comment on their methods because the old man would add that of killing and preparing sheep to the rest of my work. Having skinned it they prepared to clean it, but this was too much. I hate seeing work badly done, so I went down and hung up the carcass and finished the work. Of course, I had to do the next myself, to teach Hansen how it should be done. I could kill, skin, and clean a sheep in five minutes, which is not by any means very quick, but Hansen could never do it under about twenty minutes. Whilst on this subject of sheep I will put down a story I told the Captain, who was always most interested to hear about Australian country life. This story was told me by my stepbrother Jack, and had happened some years ago. I think he was manager of one of the stations owned by a man called Cummings. Now Jack was at that time held in great repute as a judge of sheep. At the ram sales he had been given *carte blanche* to purchase for Cummings whatever he thought was necessary at any price. He bought I know not how many, but for one he gave what was then the record price—I think 3,500 guineas. These rams eventually reached Cummings's station about sundown and I believe were penned up by a hut some miles from the head station. There was no one in the hut at the time, so the men in charge of the rams rode on to acquaint the boss of their safe arrival. During their absence the hutter, or man who does all the cooking, washing, etc., for the hut arrived. He was a half-crazy unfortunate whom my brother had given the job out of charity. He was an English 'Varsity man, one of the many similar down-and-outers in Australia. Now it was killing day. He saw the sheep. He did not know a ram from an ewe. Well, you can guess the rest. When Cummings and Jack and the men arrived on the scene they could not find the record maker. They looked about and at last found him. Mr. Threethousandfivehundred was hanging up by his hind legs and Mr. Hutter was leisurely skinning him. I know

Jack got the sack for having engaged the man. I don't know who ate the ram! Oatmeal used to be thrown into the oyster tank and offal from the sheep and poultry into the crayfish. I made one tragic discovery. We had no yeast on board. We had a stock of fresh bread when we left Sydney, but at the end of the third day out this had been consumed. Of course, I could make damper, but this did not appeal to my fellow-passengers, especially the Captain and the Consul, a fussy, red-bearded Swede, a terrible bore. Nothing satisfied either him or his wife. Away from table they groused about the food, although they could not have had better on a P. & O. liner as regards quality. Pastry and sweets she wanted, and I could not be bothered with sweets, except on Sundays. There was an abundance of tinned fruit. But their grouching got my goat, and I taught them a lesson. One day at dinner—midday, of course—the Captain, Gotaas and I had a large bowlful of oyster soup handed to us by the steward. Nothing to Consul and Fru Consul. They looked at each other but were too refined to make any remarks at table. Then followed three double mutton cutlets, tinned *petits pois* and potatoes roasted in their jackets. For the Consul and his wife, salt junk and ship's biscuit. "Perhaps you prefer the food from the other restaurant?" said the Captain. They never groused again. But they were a miserable couple. He started a bit of trouble on the forecastle. He talked to the men about their food not being good enough, or something which caused dissatisfaction. However, the skipper threatened to put him in irons if he ever trespassed into the men's quarters again.

There is no better way of making a voyage than on a well-found tramp, for one is so free of all the old brass-bound conventions of the liner. It is a real holiday. Of course, we never dressed for dinner. The Consul started doing so, but his stock of boiled shirts ran out, and there was no laundry on board. Being warm weather all the way to the Bay, we wore flannels.

The first Sunday that we all sat down to dinner together I celebrated the occasion by making a pudding. I had up to then very little experience in making sweets. But I managed to turn out a boiled pudding with currants in. When turned out of the cloth it resembled a Dalmatian dog or a barred Plymouth Rock, or an advertisement for Black-and-White. It must have weighed 6 lb., though it tasted heavier. In due course the pudding was placed on the table by the steward. The Captain, of course, served. "What's this, kid?" asked he.

"Plymouth Rock pudding," I answered.

Neither Fru Consul nor her husband, who were always served first, would have any. Gotaas, at a wink from the Captain, accepted a large helping. Ditto to me. Ditto to the Captain. Now the

Consul and his wife were most polite and particular. They would never dream of asking to leave the table, nor would they change their minds, after seeing we three were relishing the fare. We each had another helping, leaving the dish empty. The following Sunday, I made another pudding, same appearance, same weight, same consistency. It appeared on the table as before. This time, Fru Consul and Consul ejaculated: "If you please, Captain" quite cheerfully when invited to partake of it, and to each he gave a very generous portion. Gotaas the Captain and I had none. We explained we had already had such a big dinner—roast duck with onion and sage stuffing, a dish which, owing to the sea that was running, did not appeal to Herr and Fru Consul. Solemnly they waded through the pudding in silence, for their peculiar code of table manners was strictly Victorian, and one of the strict rules was to leave a clean plate. They did not appear again that day, and never again did they partake of my sweet efforts, though I certainly improved. But Plymouth Rock pudding never appeared again.

In the Indian Ocean one night, a shoal, or should I call them a flight? of flying fish, attracted by the light, flew on board amidships, when the deck was very low and we had a good roll on. Anyhow, we picked up several hundred and next morning we all, crew included, had fried fresh fish for breakfast. They were very delicate eating, somewhat resembling whiting or gar fish. When we went through the Red Sea it was indeed Red. This was caused by the fish spawn floating on the surface and to the horizon the sea had that reddish-brick tint. I don't know whether this was the reason for its name. But I noticed it again when we passed through about the same time of year, March, 1912. It was terribly hot and as most of our deck was iron we got it good and strong. It was rather monotonous at times, and we spent most of the day, Houge, Gotaas and I, playing a most complicated game of cards called "Skat". As we only played for about a penny a hundred points there was no great damage done.

Despite heavy weather in the Bight and delay caused by some slight defect in the engine-room, we reached Port Tewfik in thirty-three days out from Sydney. As soon as we downed anchor, a swarm of Arab dhows came alongside with fresh fruit and vegetables, photos which made the Fru Consul swoon, and a fair trade was done.

Here we found that our papers to pass through the canal had not arrived, and we were delayed two days. Gotaas and I decided to take advantage of this and visit Suez. We caught the funny little train from the Port to Suez, having been rowed ashore from our boat. Arrived at Suez, we were surrounded by a score of

guides. We chose one, and he showed us all the sights to be seen, very picturesque—dirt, most of it. We saw the natives going through their ablutions in most filthy water, the heaps of rotting fish in the markets, the inevitable beggar like Hajj in *Kismet*, calling "Alms for the love of Allah!", native girls giving the glad-eye, ragged-looking Shylocks and oily Greeks. Our guide took us to the Arab quarter, and here we partook of Bass at 2s. 6d. a small bottle. The ladies of the house wanted us to stay a while, but Gotaas declined for both of us.

We were followed wherever we went by a crowd of small boys asking for backsheesh. At last we entered a somewhat dilapidated restaurant for lunch. Every nationality was represented, it seemed to me. The food was messy; vile stuff. We had wine, red wine out of flagons, and not having tasted alcohol the entire voyage, I enjoyed it. Then followed Turkish coffee and liqueurs and cigarettes. I no longer smoked my pipe.

By this time I was getting very fond of life in general and myself in particular. I attempted to "shout" the entire company drink, but they were more gentlemanly than I, and refused. Eventually I swayed out of the den into the street, where it seemed the whole population of donkey-boys with their steeds was waiting for us. Offers to ride Lily Langtry, Sarah Bernhardt, Gladstone, etc., were yelled at us. Eventually I found myself astride some celebrity or other, and off we jogged the three miles to Port Tewfik. What with the vile dinner, the heat and the unaccustomed wine and liqueurs, and the exertions of the animal beneath me, by the time I had dismounted at our destination I was well over the odds. I left Gotaas, who was miserably sober and indignant, to settle with the boys. I entered the nearest café and called, as I thought, for a bottle of St. Julien. My elocution may have been faulty. However, when Gotaas joined me, he found me partaking of glassfuls of neat Hennessy. Three Star. He decided it was time we left. I did not care one way or the other. He took me by the arm and led me out into a screaming mob of boys through which I butted my way. Taking out some silver to give my particular donkey-boy a tip, some scoundrel knocked up my hand, scattering the money on the ground. Gotaas pulled me on, the boys following. Half-way across to the waterside, where the ship's boat was waiting for us, a few Arabs were squatting. As I passed them I staggered, and, to save myself, put my hand on one of the Arab heads, pushing him off his balance. This started a row, and they began pelting me with filth from the street, some of which caught the now exasperated Gotaas in the face. However, the Norwegian sailors came to the rescue with their oars and beat the scum off. Gotaas hustled me into the boat and we shoved off. I was all for going back and

fighting them. I was lying full-length on my back in the bottom of the boat. Gotaas was sitting in the stern. He had taken off the tiller and every time I raised my head he tapped me with it. By the time we reached home—the ship—I must have looked a pretty sight. I remember passing Fru Consul and her husband watching a “gully-gully” man with his disappearing chicken and other tricks. Then oblivion. The next morning I decided to rest aboard. Then the necessary papers arrived, and we started. At Ishmalia, where we stopped to take another pilot on board, Gotaas and I were on deck in our pyjamas. It was about 7 a.m. and a scorching morning. The canal water looked so cool. We asked the old man to let down the companion-ladder so we might bathe. A dive in, and then a scramble to hold on, for the icy coldness of the water had driven all breath from our bodies. It was a quaint experience.

In due time we arrived at Port Said. It was night time and we had eight hours in which to coal. This time the Captain went with us. Port Said in those days was a terrible place, the sink of the world. Dante's *Inferno*! The evil, lecherous faces, the conglomeration of every vice and passion, with no attempt at concealment, the filthy photographs openly exhibited for sale, the whining voices of the beggars, the lewd whispers of the women, and the vile suggestions of would-be guides, the pimps and panders in the guise of shopkeepers inviting one to come inside and see “pretty things”. The Captain knew the place from A to Z. He pushed his way here and there, shoving his fist into loathsome faces until I wondered they did not stick him as he passed. But of ship's officers they have a holy dread, or had. I must confess I felt a bit nervous as we left the quayside farther and farther behind, though I had my old pinfire revolver, fully loaded, in my coat-pocket, and I kept my hand round the butt. At last the Captain led us into a German beer-saloon. We sat down at a little table and had some cool German lager. An orchestra of German girls was playing the latest Austrian waltzes. Fat-faced, heavy-hipped women, all dressed alike, showing plenty of veal-like flesh. The waltz over, the girls would descend into the audience and be stood drinks, embracing the stander and his pals. They came to our table, but the Captain growled something at them, and with a shrug they passed on. In the meanwhile the entertainment was carried on by a German low comedian who certainly raised plenty of laughs. I did not understand German, but there was no mistaking his gestures and actions. Afterwards, the Captain retailed some of the jokes, most of them mere filth with no wit.

Leaving here, the Captain suggested that, for our education, we should see a peep-show. We entered a vile-looking den, paying

a pound each to do so. We entered a darkened room. Along one wall were placed chairs facing the wall, and before each chair a peephole had been pierced in the wall giving a clear view of the well-lighted room on the other side. We sat down and saw—those who know Port Said of thirty-five years ago will not need telling. To those who don't, even were it possible to tell, it would be waste of time, because they would not believe. Such was Port Said. I for one was glad to get back to the old ship, for although when we got aboard everything was begrimed with coal dust it was as pure as driven snow compared with where we had been. A little later I was sitting in my cabin reading the first letter mother had written me after our departure. Of course, they had reached Port Said well ahead of us. And there was a short letter from father enclosed. He had never been known to write a letter. He used to ask mother to write for him. But he had made this an exception. It was in perfect English, dotted here and there with Latin and Greek proverbs: "I have not written a letter for years, Oscar, and this is the last I shall ever write. So you will read it? Yes! If the money I have spent on your education has been wasted, you may be obliged to ask Houge to translate the classical quotations. Being a Norwegian gentleman he can do so." I am sorry to confess I had to take his advice. The letter went on page after page. He bared his heart, his soul, to me as to a confessor. He spared neither himself nor myself anything. He told me and warned me of pitfalls I had not dreamed of. He ended his long letter—"I write you this, my son Oscar, for I love you."

I wanted to go back home. I wanted to ask him to forgive me many things. But it was too late.

As I put his letter down and turned again to mother's I saw a black hand groping round and round through the open porthole. There was nothing within its reach, but I gave the hand a crack across the back with a beer bottle and with a yell from below, it disappeared.

Having coaled, we set out on the last lap of our journey, our destination being Antwerp, where our cargo of wool was to be unloaded. We stopped at no ports. After passing Gib. we struck bad weather and had snow and sleet all up the English Channel, arriving at Antwerp about the beginning of April. Here Gotaas left us, going to Copenhagen. And here I was to leave and continue my voyage to Bergen, as the old tramp was going next to Cardiff to load up with coal for Italy. A small steamer ran from Antwerp to Bergen, and my passage was booked and my luggage put on board. A tearful farewell with the Captain, and his wife, who had joined him at Antwerp, and I stepped on board. It looked like bad weather. I shared a pokey little cabin with three Belgians,

and the place stank. We were about to cast off. I went up on deck. Here seemed all confusion. I noticed the skipper was blind to the world. I made up my mind. I ran down to the cabin, seized my gladstone-bag, which contained all clothes for the moment, rushed up on deck and jumped on to the quay just as the boat was moving away. Someone on board yelled at me, but I had had enough. I got a cab and drove back to the dock where the old tramp lay. Great was the surprise of the Captain and wife. But that night I occupied my old cabin again.

However, I could not stay for ever. Another route was found. By boat to Harwich and thence from Hull to Bergen. Again my passage was booked, and again I did not sail. I remember, after the Captain and his wife had seen me safely on board, the boat not due to sail for another two hours, they left me. An hour later I stepped ashore with gladstone-bag, telling the steward I was going to do some shopping. Why, I do not know, but I visited a pigeon-loft. I had heard of Antwerp carrier-pigeons and, being in Antwerp I wanted to have a look. I ended up by buying a pair, which I carried off in a wickerwork cage. It was still light. The Harwich boat had sailed. I dared not go back in full light to the old *Jarlsberg*. So I went to the best hotel I could find, and had a very good dinner, and, to give me courage to face the Captain, I had a bottle of champagne. Dinner over and darkness arrived, I ordered a cab and drove down again to the docks. The sailor on watch at the gangway laughed aloud as he recognized me, and I started walking to the old cabin. I knocked at the door. And from within I heard the Captain's deep voice laugh. "I'll bet you that's the kid!" And in I went, and both of them, roaring with laughter, embraced me.

"And why have you come back this time, kid?" asked the Captain.

"I missed the boat," I explained. "I went to see a pigeon-loft, to pass the time, and stayed too long. I bought you two as a present." And I handed him the birds.

"A sacrifice to Venus," said he, handing them over to his wife, who was a very lovely woman.

It was then and there settled that I should travel with them to Cardiff. Arrived at Cardiff, the end soon came. They saw me off *this time* by train to Newcastle-on-Tyne, whence a Norwegian steamer would take me to Bergen. I waved my sad adieus from the window of my carriage.

Arrived at Newcastle, I found that the steamer did not leave till the following day. I had to put up somewhere for the night. I went to the County Hotel and booked a room. I spent the afternoon in a curious way. I got on a tram or a bus, and it landed me

at a cemetery. I walked about the cemetery for hours, reading the inscriptions on the tombstones. After dinner I went to the Theatre Royal, where I witnessed a performance of *Hamlet*. Probably it was the Benson Company, or Osmond Tearle's, or Vezin. I cannot remember. On being handed my hotel account the following morning, I reckoned I should just have sufficient to pay it and get on board. I had to apologize to the hall porter for the smallness of my tip, rs., but even that only left me my cab-fare. I got on board with not a penny in my pocket.

I think the name of the steamer was *The Britannia*. She was under the Norwegian and Swedish flag. I handed the commander a letter from Captain Houge, and he was most kind. I told him the state of my exchequer and he at once replenished it, which was repaid on my arrival in Bergen. Some distant cousin met me, father having written him and put my financial affairs in his hands. He had taken rooms for me, and meant to be very kind, but tried to treat me as a child, the poor mutt !

I had my first meal at my cousin's house. I was very hungry, but before anything was served, the whole family, consisting of him and his wife and nine children, together with the servant, all joined in a prayer of thanksgiving for my safe arrival, then swung into a long hymn, and then he made a long, long speech in Norwegian, from which I gathered I was being welcomed. I had to reply, which I did in English, they not understanding a word. By this time the soup was stone-cold. Norwegians are very fond of speeches at meals. There is a formal etiquette somewhat staggering to a stranger. For instance, you are invited out to dinner. The host greets you with "Welcome to my house." You reply, "Thanks shall you have." You sit down to dinner. He says, "Welcome to table." You reply, "Thanks shall you have." He fills his glass. You fill yours. He cries, "Skaal !" and salutes you with his glass. You cry, "Skaal !" and salute likewise. Having drunk, you salute with the empty glass. He does the same. Then the hostess calls "Skaal" to you, and you call "Skaal" to her. And you both salute. Then each one of the family in turn cries "Skaal" and you cry "Skaal" in return. As the liquor used is *aqua vita* from Trondjem, a most insinuating *apéritif* made from caraway seeds, I think, by the time you have been "skaaled" by all the family and "skaaled" them, you are pretty well "sozzled". You start your meal ; you have already partaken of various titbits at a side-table before sitting down. The meal may last two hours or more. And every time wine is poured out, you cry "Skaal" and they cry "Skaal". At the very, very end of the meal, you say, as solemnly and as soberly as you can : "Thanks for the meal". And the host replies in a kind of undertaker's voice and as distinctly as he can—

for by this time he is also "canned"—"Well may it become you." A literal translation. When you take up your hat eventually to leave, after many more cries of "Skaal" over all kinds of spirits, you set your heels together and bend from the middle, doing this as well as your condition permits, and, taking your host's hand in yours, you say: "Thanks for to-night." He mutters *something* in reply—what, I have never been sure. Either I have been too blotto at this stage to hear distinctly or my host unable to articulate.

But that is not the *end* of it. Oh, dear, no! If you meet him the next day, you smile a sickly smile at him and say: "Thanks for last night." And he smiles a sickly smile, and answers: "Most welcome." Of course, if it is handy, you each stand the other a drink, so as to cry "Skaal" at each other again.

Even that is not the end of formality. Meeting your host several days after, you greet him quite cheerfully with: "Thank you for the last (time of entertainment)." And then, according to his nature, he replies cheerfully: "Most welcome"—by which you know there is another dinner in the offing—or he will wave his hand in a deprecating manner and say most politely: "Don't mention it," or words to that effect. Then you know he's had enough, and it's up to you to ask him to your place and shout "Skaal" at him until *he* is sozzled, and it is *his* turn to remember all the different thankings, and you can mutter inarticulately.

The Norwegians are most hospitable, and have a very keen sense of humour—or none at all. I was never quite certain.

CHAPTER FIVE

Bergen—Christiania—Ibsen—Björnsterne Björnson—London

TWO days after I had settled down in very comfortable rooms, my main luggage arrived, nearly a week late. The boat on which it had been shipped and from which I had slipped away had been tossing about for days in the North Sea with a broken propeller-shaft. In Bergen I had a very good time. I was a curiosity, an Australian, and I was expected to be coloured. I was invited to become a paying-guest at the house of the Russian Consul, Herr Thompson. He and his wife made me quite one of the family. They could both speak English and French, and I soon mastered to a certain extent the Norwegian language.

I started studying deportment and voice-production under a good master. I had the entrée to the theatre at all times and never missed a performance. In modern work the Norwegian excels. Easy, natural, with perfect technique. At his and her best in Ibsen modern plays. In Shakespeare and costume plays, the actors and actresses seemed out of the period. They worked hard and were poorly paid. Ibsen had formerly been stage director at the Bergen theatre. I enjoyed the life very much, especially in the winter, when sleighing, tobogganing, skating and ski-ing were in season. One of the pleasantest ways of spending a winter night in Norway is sledging by moonlight. At Bergen we used to start out at morning. Each sledge held two. A woman strapped into a seat just above the ground on the runners, and the man who drove sitting on a kind of high bicycle seat behind with his feet on the runners. One has sometimes to use one's feet going round corners to keep the sledge from turning over. We used to pick the girl we were sweetest on, and there were no chaperons in Norway, and behind a fast horse with its jingling bells, and drive off two and two, and it was most conducive to love-making. And the Norwegian girl is quite warm-blooded. Before starting we would telephone out to a restaurant several miles away to prepare supper. Arrived there we would rug up the horses and see they were fed and watered and then go into the big dining-room with the stove-heated atmosphere. Here we would feast, drink, and be merry, and then someone would sit down at the piano and we would dance. No gramophones, no jazz in those days, but it was

every bit as lively. This would go on until the moon was about to set. Then we would strap in our sweethearts again and drive back home. And many were the vows of undying love made on those return journeys. The next day you would if matters had gone far enough go down to the shops and buy a ring. And that you would place on your fair lady's finger when you drove out again that night. It was wonderful while it lasted. But some other fellow or some other girl used to come along, and back would come the ring to be worn on some other hand.

The festivals at Christmas-time last for weeks. Party succeeds party, and one gets quite confused, thanking the right person and saying the proper thing. But I had a very good time in Bergen. I think during the twelve months or so I was there I became unofficially engaged four times. Of course, if you are officially engaged you and your fiancée advertise the fact by walking about arm-in-arm. Everybody, stranger and all, congratulates them as they pass. And I believe the same thing happens if a married woman is going to have a baby. She walks arm-in-arm with her husband round the park on Sunday morning. There are some very just laws in Norway. For example, if a widower with children marries again, the Government set aside a large portion of his fortune or income for the sole use of those children. And no man can cut his son off with a shilling in Norway. No, the Government decide how much shall go to each child and to his widow. I do not think there were any millionaires in Bergen, in sterling, anyhow. But I saw no real poverty. And one used to be able to live very cheaply. Cook's tourists had started spoiling the natives by tipping. Fortunately they had not at that time contaminated the peasant class. I went on a fishing expedition for a month, some thirty miles away. Here I stayed in a peasant's house for a month, paying about ros. for the entire time for bedroom and as much milk and dairy produce as I could consume. Meat, fish, etc., and tea, coffee and other groceries one had to buy. Here I caught trout and salmon. The life of the peasants is very simple. The farm passes from eldest son to eldest son, and at the age of either sixty or sixty-five the father has to hand over the management and he becomes the honourable life-guest, so to speak. Where I stayed there was one long bedroom, in which four generations slept. In the bed of honour slept the former owner of the farm and his wife, aged about eighty. This bed had a bed-pull, to enable the old folk to turn over. In the next bed slept the present owner and his wife. He was nearing his allotted time, being about sixty. In the next bed slept his eldest son and his wife. He was the head worker of the farm. And in a cot at the end of the room slept his eldest son, a boy of about five. When the head bed is rendered vacant by

death, all move up one. The baby moves into his father's bed, and there he remains until he brings his wife to that bed. And so on *ad infinitum*. The other sons and daughters are allotted a room for each sex. The younger son eventually emigrates to America or Australia. Each peasant farmer has to keep so many miles of the public road in good repair.

The old fellow at this farm I have seen go to sleep in the soaking rain on the ground, after a day's work, and then come in afterwards and dry himself by sitting on the stove. No wonder he was almost crippled with rheumatism. One of the little daughters on this farm was a girl about thirteen. She was a perfect type of the Norwegian peasant girl. Long flaxen hair in two pigtails, a shell-like complexion, cornflower-blue eyes, and a perfect little face. To see her in her peasant dress on Sundays was something not easily forgotten. And she used to walk off to church holding the hand of the future head of the house, a beautiful chubby fair-haired baby boy of four or five. He got very pally with me, this little fellow, and loved coming up to my room and unpacking my bag and rummaging amongst my things. Whilst here I had rather an unpleasant experience one night. I had gone out fishing for trout some distance away in the dusk of the evening, using a local white or cream fly. It came on to rain and blow, so I put up my rod, having caught quite enough for one evening, and started walking back. On my way I had to pass a big lake. And here the wind blew my hat well out into the forbidding-looking water with the wind sailing it still farther out. It was the only hat I had up there, so I thought I must save it, which was idiotic. However, I stripped, and put my things under a bush and waded in. The water was like ice and took one's breath. However, after a time I rescued the hat and got back to shore. But I had landed some distance away from where I had gone in and it took me about an hour to find my things, by now, soaking wet. However, I managed to get into them somehow and tramped back the remaining couple of *Norwegian* miles to the farm-house. I was shivering with cold. But I had an unopened bottle of cognac upstairs in case of emergency. In opening this, my hands were shaking, so that the bottle fell out of my hands and dropped, of course, on my iron dumb-bells on the floor, broke, and all the liquor gone. So I had to wake up the household, and they brewed me some coffee. Next day I had a bad cold and stayed in bed. The wife of the present head of the farm was most kind and came and waited on me and nursed me. Unfortunately she was suffering from religious mania, and she thoroughly put the wind up me, as the saying is now, by detailing to me the terrible tortures and time I was going to experience hereafter. And she used to sing the most mournful hymns over

me until I almost imagined myself as the principal character at an Irish wake. They were all very sorry when I left and gave me a kind of farewell supper. My little pal drove down with me to the station and cried when I kissed him good-bye.

In Bergen I earned my first money, apart from the miserable wine-and-spirit 10s. a week. I translated into English for a Dr. Hansen, the brother of Irgen Hansen, the stage director, a long article on leprosy. He contends that it is caused by excessive fish-eating, and that it is most prevalent in countries where fish is the staple diet. The Eskimos, the Chinese near the coast, certain tribes of Arabs, Indians, etc. Now the Norwegians are great fish-eaters, but not solely fish-eaters (no pun intended), and the Norwegian girl has a most clear and transparent skin. An excess of fish-eating, and this fine skin becomes the skin of a leper. I received £5 for my translation.

Bergen is famous for its fish-market or quay. Here in tanks supplied with constantly-running sea-water live fish of every description are kept. The housewife bargains for a cert in fish she desires. The bargain is struck, the fish is netted and killed and the sale completed. The Norwegians are the only people who can cook cod to perfection. They lard it with bacon and a sweet gherkin, and fry it brown in good butter. Plenty of butter is the secret of all good cooking. Ptarmigan, so dry and tasteless elsewhere, is in Norway a most delicious dish. Sadle of reindeer larded is another favourite, and bear ham, though the latter I could never fancy.

A wedding-feast in the country lasts six or seven days. Meat is very poor, and a lot of kid and goat used to be eaten. Perhaps, now, they have chilled American beef and Canterbury lamb.

After about two months in Bergen I sailed in company with a funny little Spaniard, Talavera, to Christiania, now Oslo. We left on the first Tuesday in February, again, in a crazy little steamer, and met from the outset most terrible weather. Arrived, after being nearly a week overdue, I lodged with some relations of my father, and there I met many of his old college friends, all anxious to hear about him. In return, I heard much about him and his enormous strength as a young man. One tale was singularly typical. On one of his vacations he visited Copenhagen. He entered a beer saloon and sat at a table alone. Across the room one table was occupied by several Danish students. Spotting my father as a Norwegian student by his cap, the head student, a tall, powerful youth, crossed over to my father and stood in front of him and bowed. My father rose and bowed in return. Then the Dane, as was the trick of his lot, butted my father in the temple, saying: "Welcome." This is the Danish students' greeting. My father was stunned, sank

back in his chair, and the fellow rejoined his comrades. After some little time, my father came to, collected his senses, and swallowed several quarts of Danish lager. Then he paid his reckoning, and crossed over to the Danish students' table, and bowed to his aggressor. The Dane stood up. My father held out his hand, saying: "Farewell." The Dane put his hand within my father's grip—that terrible grip. Not a word was spoken. The Dane gradually sank to his knees, and, having crushed and broken every bone in the fellow's hand, my father released him, saying: "That is the Norwegian student's leave-taking." He then left the saloon. After that, the Norwegian's leave-taking became a household word.

It was in the lounge of the Grand Café that I first met Ibsen. He was pleasantly drunk. I had a letter to him of introduction from the mother-in-law of Captain Houge, a Fru Treselt, an old sweetheart of his in Bergen who had jilted him because he wore dirty shirt-cuffs. I presented the letter. He read it and smiled, and invited me to a seat by his side. For half an hour or so he conversed with me about the Suez Canal, and that only. At last he dismissed me with the words: "I shall see you again. Good morning." The next time I met the great man was in King Oscar Street, and I lifted my hat as we were about to pass. He pulled up short and turned on me a torrent of indignation. "Do you not know better manners than to dare salute me when I have not saluted you? Do you not know, you uncivilized person from a barbarous country, that it is for the elder to salute the younger? Must I be annoyed by every nincompoop lifting his hat to me in the public street because I have deigned some time or other to have noticed his existence? Go you to some master of manners." This is a rough idea of the wrath poured upon me before a smiling collection of passers-by. Moreover, he used the "du" instead of "you". "Du" is only used in addressing servants or one's most intimate friends.

About a week later we met again. It was in the Grand Café after the theatre, at supper. I was sitting with a couple of friends when into the restaurant stumps Henrik Ibsen. I turned my head aside. But he had spotted me, and came right up to our table. "If your friends will excuse you, I should like you to join me at my table," he growled, and all around heard him. Naturally my friends, who had risen to their feet at the great master's approach, were all bows and exclamations of "Certainly! Naturally!" etc. I had not risen, because I had determined to sit through any more abuse and give it him back. "Come," he growled, and I rose and followed. "Such honour! unheard-of," everyone must have been thinking or whispering. I had a very pleasant though embarrassing evening. I had several talks with him after that, and many were the hints he gave me. "I should like you to play Dr. Stockman



[Photograph by Hissid]

AS CHRISTOPHER SLY IN "THE TAMING OF THE SHREW"

(The Enemy of the People)," he said to me once. "But clear out of this little, little country. Go to your own tongue language. Waste of time here."

I also had a letter of introduction to Björn Björnson, the son of the great rival of Ibsen. Björn was stage director of the National Theatre, Christiania. He had received his training in the Saxe Meiningen Company. He was in those days a ginger-headed, round-faced boy of a man, a very fine actor and a prince of producers. He excelled as Richard III. Had he been an English-speaking actor he would have occupied the highest position on the English stage. He was most charming and helpful to me. Every morning at nine I went to him for an hour's instruction. He would make me enter the room, close the door, and sit down on the sofa time after time, until my movements satisfied him. Such simple things as this took hours and hours. From him I learnt technique, the pitch of the voice, and the sounding of final consonants. As a result, no one has ever been able to accuse me of inaudibility, the besetting sin of present-day actors, many of whom know nothing about their art beyond stage-door gossip. It was one morning at nine that I met his great father, with his leonine head and marvellous voice and vitality. His mother was also present, a little, retiring woman and hard of hearing. This morning I sat and listened. They were having breakfast. Suddenly the sound of cannon boomed out, conversation stopped. Another boom, and conversation started, so swift, so excited, that I could not follow it. I thought father and son were at loggerheads. But no, it was caused, all this uproar and the shaking of fists, by the royal salute to King Gustav as his yacht entered the fjord. For father and son, especially the father, were loyal Norwegians and hated the union of Norway and Sweden. One of the acts Napoleon was answerable for. However, Björnsterne Björnson was, I have always heard, chiefly instrumental in Norway becoming once more a separate kingdom.

Through all this turmoil Fru Björnson placidly continued eating her breakfast. Björnson the elder had a most rich and resonant voice, and very flexible. He could sway, turn, and twist an audience at his pleasure. A veritable Mark Antony. I was present the first night of a revival after many years of *Peer Gynt*, Björn Björnson playing Peer. He gave a great performance and a very artistic production. Ibsen was present, sitting behind the grille on the ground-floor stage box. One could see every now and then the well-known white whiskers. He had never taken a call on the National Theatre stage since the authorities had boycotted his powerful play *Ghosts*. At the end, the whole audience seemed determined to make him break his rule. They yelled: "Ibsen!

Ibsen ! Ibsen !” For a fraction of a second we saw him looking through the lattice-work screen at the audience. Then he seemed to move stagewards. Then up went the curtain and the audience waited in silent expectation. Then appeared a nervous individual—it was probably a stage-hand—who tendered Herr Ibsen’s apologies, but he was in a hurry for his supper at the Grand Café. Silently the crowd left the theatre. Trudging along on the snowy footpath, with his gamp in one hand, the other behind his back, Henrik Ibsen. As we of the audience overtook and passed him, we stepped off the sideway into the road, returning to the path when some yards ahead of him. And he seemed to be chuckling, or was it our fancy ? That night he sat at his accustomed table at the café, with his beloved Vienna steak and lager beer, scowling more than ever, oblivious of everyone.

I was present one other night at this same café, when an amusing comedy took place. Ibsen was in his old seat, eating his same old supper. There entered an American tripperess, accompanied by a Norwegian journalist of no importance. Catching sight of Ibsen, she at once gave birth to a veritable litter of American expressions, ending up with : “Say, do you know Ibsen ?” to her cavalier, who was most uneasy. “Yes, yes,” mumbled he, striving to lead her to his table. Unhappy man ! That “yes, yes !” was his undoing. “Then you must introduce me to him. I must shake hands with that old guy, so that I can cock-a-doodle it over my friends in U.S.A.” Those were not the exact words, but something like them, only more naturally American and vulgar. It was useless for him to protest, so poor Mr. Journalist, feeling like death, approached *the* table, his American Delilah at his side. He bowed several times, then spoke, and there was silence in the restaurant, all stopping eating to listen. “Herr Ibsen, I take the great liberty, if you will permit me, to introduce to you a citizeness of that great country, the United States of America, where your name is a household word. She would be honoured indeed if she could, on her return home, tell her fellow-citizenesses that she had been presented to the Great Master. Will you permit ?”

Ibsen had continued eating and drinking, unperturbed. He now looked up from under his shaggy eyebrows. “Wilt thou (‘du’ as to a servant) call the waiter ?”

“Waiter,” called the poor sheep, “Herr Ibsen desires your attendance.” And the waiter bowed to the great man. “Waiter,” said Ibsen, as he put a forkful of steak into his mouth, and then pointing at the journalist with the empty fork, “remove this man. He is annoying me.” That was all. Then chatter again. But to the journalist—tableau, curtains which stick, and will not close-to. Poor fellow !

There is another story of Ibsen. The University Dramatic Society, hearing that Ibsen had expressed his wish to see one of their prominent members play Brand, put the play into rehearsal, and when all was ready for the performance a deputation waited on Ibsen to honour the performance with his presence. To their humble pleadings, he replied: "Do you not think it sufficient for me to witness my plays ruined by the performances of professional actors? Must I honour with my presence their degradation by amateurs?"

I believe Ibsen did not attend the marriage of his son to Björnson's daughter. They waited for him, but he sent word he was too busy. Notwithstanding all this, he was loved by his people, and he would stop in the street and hold long conversations with workmen. To understand Ibsen's plays one must see them produced and performed by Scandinavian artists. Ibsen's plays are always sadly miscast in England.

Ibsen was a great stage-manager. Nothing ever escaped him: but he was a martinet. I am told he used to express his displeasure at rehearsal by calling down to the footlights the offending artist and, from the other side of the orchestra rail, throw his top-hat at him or her. Then he would ask for it to be handed back.

After several months' tuition under Björn, he advised me to go to England. So I left via Stockholm, Copenhagen, Berlin, Brussels, at each city spending a week or so, and going to the theatre every night. It was, I think, in Berlin I saw Joseph Kanz as Hamlet. Strangely enough, I have never been to Paris.

I arrived in London in the early summer and took up my abode in Guilford Street. It was a board- and lodging-house, 30s. a week. I was asked to leave, after the first day, by the landlady, because I had asked for a second helping of curried rabbit at dinner. I took rooms, a sitting-room and bedroom, a little lower down the street, and with the exception of breakfast had most of my meals out. I still had my allowance from home of £10 a week, which in those days was quite useful. I read the announcement columns, and chose *Richard III* at the Olympic for my first London theatre, Richard was played by Edmund Tearle, and I could only quote *Macbeth*—"This is a bloody business." Next night I saw Irving in *Henry VIII*. What a production! What a performance of the Cardinal! Majestic! Terriss as King Hal, Forbes-Robertson as Buckingham, and Ellen Terry as Katharine. I went six times in succession to see this.

Many years after, I saw Tree's production at His Majesty's Theatre. A litho to an Old Master.

Naturally I saw everything Irving did. Then I presented a letter of introduction to him from William Archer, who in his young days had gone for Irving tooth-and-nail. I had a letter of introduction to Archer from Ibsen, who, in giving it to me, said: "He translated my plays—very badly, I suppose." Irving made an appointment with me and advised me to go and study elocution with Walter Lacey. I did so, paying him a guinea an hour, to listen to the successes he had made, how he had wiped Fechter off the stage, etc. I read Milton's *Comus* with him, and in between anecdotes he corrected my Australian accent. After Lacey, I went for a course under Henry Neville. Then I looked for work, and found none. So back to Norway at Christmas, to give a recital of Shakespeare, and spend a good time with my friends. My recital was a success, and I made a little money on it.

Back to London. I at last got an engagement in a small part with Arthur Dacre and Amy Roselle at the Opéra Comique, in *Man and Woman*. The following were in the caste, besides the Dacres: Henry Neville, Herbert Standing, Sam Sothern, Charles Fulton, Lena Ashwell, Eva Moore, Sant Mathews, Tom Lovell, Robert Lorraine (Sen.). Herbert Standing was a bit of a boxer, and, hearing I could use my hands, he used to spar with me just before one of the acts which he opened. Now he had a broken nose, which he filled in very carefully with nose-paste. It was my one ambition to flick this added nose off his face. At last, one evening, I succeeded, his artificial nose sticking to the middle finger of my left. At that moment the curtain was due to go up. But on this occasion it had to be kept waiting for ten minutes whilst Standing put on another nose. He never sparred with me again.

The play was a failure, only lasting a month. The last Saturday matinée and evening the company gave their services for the benefit of the Dacres. All except Standing. He wanted £5 for each performance. And at first they refused to pay it. I was his understudy and was hoping for my chance. But they decided to pay. Standing sat in a chair by the side of the stage, with his boots off and his hand held out for his money. As soon as this was paid, he put on his boots and went on. He afterwards made his home in America, which was only natural.

Some years after, the Dacres committed suicide in Australia, he shooting his wife and then himself. In connection with this there was a peculiar coincidence. I was at the time with the Benson Company, and after the show several of us were sitting in the bar at the Chester Theatre. There was, among many others, an old litho of Arthur Dacre, hanging over one of his wife, Amy Roselle. He heard a crash, and it was found that the string of Dacre's picture had broken and his frame fell on that of his wife, and both lay

broken on the floor. The following morning the paper announced their tragic deaths.

After my short engagement at the Opéra Comique, I contrived to secure an interview with F. R. Benson. I recited to him, and he questioned me as to my athletic abilities, especially as to my cricket, being an Australian. "Can you keep wicket?" he inquired. "I might have come over with the last team as understudy to Blackham," I answered. So I *might*. Pigs might fly. Anyhow, I *had* kept wicket, and Kenny Burn, the Tasmanian, who did come to understudy old Jack Blackham, never had. I was engaged on the spot for the autumn.

Soon after this came the smash. I went into the City one morning to draw my month's allowance of £40. I was handed this with the intimation that that was the final remittance. I had news the following Monday morning from home that father was broke over the Bank smash, and I must look out for myself. So I had £40 odd left in the world. Before this had quite run out, I had a wire from Benson's manager at Stratford-on-Avon to join at once. That night I "shot the moon", leaving my digs in the middle of the night, leaving my heavy luggage behind me as security for what was owing, about £15. This I redeemed some time later. I went and stayed the rest of that night with a pal, Riordan O'Connell, a merry little Irishman, now a well-known writer. He will remember how, in the early morning, before I caught my train to Stratford-on-Avon, we played cricket with a stick and a rolled-up paper ball.

Arrived at Stratford, I was given the part of Antonio in *Twelfth Night*, to play the following night. Benson was down with typhoid. Hence the vacancy. I soon had the part committed to memory and rehearsed word-perfect. But alas! through reading the part over and over again all day, when I went on the stage at night I dried up, and could only mutter nonsense. However, I stayed on. It was the birthday week, and I think the tour lasted another two weeks. Then I returned to town, with several weeks to go before I rejoined. No digs, no money, except a few, a very few, pounds. I had no friends. I put my one and only trunk and gladstone-bag in a railway property office and started out to see those weeks through.

It was beautiful weather, and, accustomed to sleep in the open, dossing it out on the Embankment was no hardship. And there were lots of things to see free of charge in the daytime. I had a stout suit of clothes and a handkerchief knotted round the neck, *à la Bush*, and a flannel shirt avoided laundry bills. There was any amount of drinking-water, which is not always so in the bush, but no rabbits nor birds, except the London pigeons, and

no means of catching them. Of course, I was getting no letters from home, as these were addressed to Guilford Street, where I could not go. I went to the bank in the City in a vain hope, and, much to my surprise, there was something like four pounds of odd interest to my credit. With this I could manage to see the summer through. I slept on the Embankment at night. In the day-time I went to Lord's or the Oval to watch the cricket. A late supper at night at the coffee-stalls, and I was all right, except for the rain. I got so soaked one night that I had to spend some money on a mackintosh. But talk of the loneliness of the bush! The loneliness of London, with its teeming millions, is loneliness with a vengeance.

At last the weeks of waiting came to an end. I got my luggage out of the property office, changed into clean clothes in the station lavatory, and rejoined the Benson Company. I think we reopened at Stratford-on-Avon. Anyhow, cricket was still on, for in my first match with the Company I got a badly-cut eye, keeping on a fiery wicket. I had arrived with just a few bob left, and so my first salary of 35s. was most welcome. This time I did not swank it as before by staying at the Shakespeare Hotel. I found rooms, where I stayed for years after, in Shakespeare Street.

CHAPTER SIX

Bensonian Days

THUS began my Bensonian days. I started with small parts, a citizen in *Julius Cæsar*, Charles the Wrestler in *As You Like It*. Benson only revived that so he could have a good wrestle with me. How he loved that wrestle! So did I! During our week at Manchester H. R. Hignett joined the company. He carried an umbrella with a rubber ring round it. No one had ever seen an actor in the Benson Company before with an umbrella. He was an Oxford M.A. and a fine all-round athlete, except at swimming, though he used to shiver in goal at water polo. He was a stylish bat and great cover, and a good half-back at soccer and hockey.

After leaving Manchester, Hig and I lived together for years and years. Sometimes we would condescend to admit another member into the firm. But out they went unless found suitable, or too talkative. O. B. Clarence, another well-known and good actor, was also a member. George Weir, Frank Rodney, Alfred Brydone, George Hippisley, Lyall Swete, Graham Brown, though later; as was Henry Ainley. And many of those who were members of our happy brotherhood are now dead. In the beginning we never took any stock of what women were in the company. Women did not count with us in those days. We were too fond of athletics to think of anything else. That was all changed later.

The company was the training-school of some of the most successful actors and actresses on the English stage. Respect was paid by junior to senior members, and it was not for many years that F. R. Benson, for whom we all had a great respect and love, was openly called Pa. We elder members always resented it. And I think that was the beginning of the decline in the Benson Company. Among the members were Louis Calvert, Otho Stuart, and William Mollison, the latter a grand character actor and a great leg-puller and practical joker. He, with Stephen Phillips, the poet, and Benson's cousin, worked off many spoofs. There was a young actor joined the company, whom let us call Knight. He was fresh, I think, from an office, an absolute dud. He used to dress on Sundays, when we always travelled, in top-hat, frock-coat, and button-up boots. One Saturday night Mollison asked him quite casually if he had ever been in Scotland. They were travelling the

following day to Glasgow. No, he had never been in Scotland. Had he never been over the Border? Never! "Oh, you will find it very interesting, then, somewhat like crossing the line at sea for the first time. Certain traditions and ceremonials still exist, even in these days," said Mollison; then adding: "You have a kilt, I suppose?" No, he had no kilt. "Oh, well, laddie, we'll find you one from the Rob Roy wardrobe. Don't worry. Just bring to the station a wee handbag."

The following morning at the railway station Knight turned up, as usual, top-hat, frock-coat, button-up boots, and a little leather bag. He rode in the same carriage with Mollison and Phillips. "Put that in your bag, Knight," said Mollison, handing him a paper parcel containing the kilt. They settled down to a game of poker together with the manager, Jalland. Many hours after, Mollison looked at his watch. "We're nearing the Border station"—Carstairs I think it was—"so you'd better get your kilt on." "What happens?" asked Knight, taking the parcel out of the bag and undoing it. "Oh," said Mollison, "the guard just passes along the carriages, calling out: 'Anyone not been over the Border before?' And, of course, as a man of honour, you reply, 'I have not.' He then requests you to honour Scotland, which you either do by walking up and down the platform in your kilt, or paying for a drop of Scotch all round." So Knight put on the kilt, assisted by all three. The train pulled up, and sure enough the guard, well bribed, cried out: "Anyone not been over the Border before?" And Knight stepped out on to the platform—top-hat, frock-coat, Rob Roy kilt, Jaeger underpants, black stockings and button-up boots. The train was a long one, with several other companies hooked on, and on the opposite side a long train of companies going South. And up and down that platform, escorted by William Mollison, the gallant Knight did Scotland honour. When the train started again, and he was safely back in the carriage, he commented on the ribald laughter and jeers of the onlookers. "Well, laddie, you happened to be the only one to be new to the country," said Molly. Knight then missed his bag, into which he had deposited his rolled-up trousers. The bag was gone. "Probably," said Phillips, "the baggage-man of the company, seeing it in an empty carriage, has put it in with the rest of the luggage in the van. You'll get it to-morrow." "But what about *this*?" cried Knight, indicating his kilt. "You're in the national costume now, so don't worry about your trousers." After a while, Phillips asked: "Have you got your digs in Glasgow?" No, he had not. Arrived at Glasgow, Phillips and Mollison walked him out of the station. They were soon followed by a jeering crowd of youths. Eventually they had to put him up for the night in their digs.

Many were the jokes played at his expense, most of them unpublisable. But one more at least I can relate.

Knight had been grouching because he never was given anything but a walk-on. "Well," said Mollison, "Sheridan's *Rivals* goes up next week, and you are bound to play the leading comedy part, being the newest member." Knight knew nothing about *The Rivals*, but he did know George Weir always played the principal comedy parts. "What about Mr. Weir?" asked he. "Oh, George plays Bob Acres, but you, laddie, *you* play Jack Absolute's bodyguard, and get *the* laugh of the evening." Thus Molly. So Knight bought him a copy of *The Rivals*, but no mention of such a part could he find, and he told Mollison so. "No, laddie, it's not in the book. It's a traditional part," said he. The cast went up for rehearsal, and he was not called for rehearsal. "Why?" asked he. "It never is rehearsed," he was told. "You just come down on the night, are made up and dressed, and just go through a simple enough scene." So on the first night Phillips and Mollison made him up and dressed him. Roman sandals, red tights, a bit of plate-armour and, of course, kilts, and a Grecian helmet. A burnt-cork moustachios, red rose, and a boy's drum hung round his shoulders completed the get-up of Jack Absolute's bodyguard. "Now, listen," said Mollison. "You don't show yourself until Benson is about to go on as Jack. Then you stand behind, and follow on. He will see you, and ask you what you are doing. You will touch your forelock, and say: 'Tradition, sir.' He will order you back to your room. You touch your forelock, and answer: 'Tradition, sir. I follow you wherever you go.' He will then tell the stage-manager to kick you off the stage. But, as you value your position in the company, break away at all costs, follow Benson on to the stage, beating a rat-a-tat-tat on the drum." Such were his instructions. And he followed them out to the letter. And Benson spoke as had been foretold. And the stage-manager seized him, but Knight broke loose and followed Jack Absolute on to the stage, and beat a rat-a-tat-tat on his drum. And he *did* get the laugh of the evening. And he also got the sack. But Phillips and Mollison explained, and he was retained for further use.

There was always a lot of fun to be had, and a lot of hard work. And we simply lived either in cricket flannels or football shorts from morning to dinner before the theatre. Rehearsals every morning until it was time for the football, hockey, or water-polo match which took place nearly every day of the week. In consequence, we were very fit and able to work. Wonderful times! And we lived well. Our bills rarely came to more than 15s. a week per head. We brought off some remarkable results at games, considering we were only theatricals. For instance, at hockey

we beat Oxford one day, and nearly beat Cambridge the next, drawing, I think, with them. At water-polo we beat Lancaster, who were the holders of the Northern Counties Cup. The local publicans bet 10 to 1 against us scoring a goal and 20 to 1 against us winning. As I had never failed to score a goal in any game, I put all the money I could scrape together—about 15s.—on at 10 to 1. I scored a goal in the first half-minute. Then I scored two more, Graham Brown one, and Langley one; and we won by 5 goals to 3. And the staff to a man had put their week's savings on at 20 to 1.

The tour ended shortly after the Stratford-on-Avon Festival, by which time I had saved about £1. I was re-engaged for the following tour, starting in the early autumn, at £2 10s. a week. There was an eight-weeks' vacation to get through. I borrowed £50 from Benson, to be paid off at £1 a week on rejoining. I immediately played poker with him and others on the journey to London, and won a few pounds. On the strength of this £50 which were burning in my pocket, I stayed at the Covent Garden Hotel for a few days, which lightened my purse exceedingly. At the end of the first week of the vacation I had £10 left. Then I looked for rooms, and found two small rooms on the top floor of a house in Stratton Street, over Waterloo Bridge. The rent was 10s. a week, and I was wise enough to pay the woman the whole sum weeks in advance. Anyhow, I would have a roof over my head and a place for my small amount of luggage. She charged an exorbitant price for breakfast, 1s. 9d. for two eggs and one rasher, or two rashers and one egg. That was the only variation. At the end of the first week I owed her 12s. 3d. I had exactly a pound left, having lost money at betting, so after paying her I had 7s. 9d. left.

Then began a really hard time for me, worse than my previous Embankment experiences. The following week I was unable to pay for my week's breakfasts, and she started dunning me. I had pawned all my valuables long ago, and I was now reduced to one suit of clothes, with an extra pair of trousers. After staying away three nights, I turned up at Stratton Street, getting to my rooms unobserved. There, on the table, were three breakfasts for the three mornings I had been absent. I wolfed the lot. She caught me on the way out, but I made some excuse, saying I would be back that night. Letters from home, addressed to the Actors' Association, were now reaching me. Times were bad there. Mother wrote telling me there was a man (whom I will call G——) in London who owed her several hundred pounds, and enclosed a letter asking him to pay me £200 of it. He lived at the Hotel Victoria. There I tackled him, but he was very plausible, and though he admitted the debt, said he was short of ready cash. However, from time to

time I got a sovereign from him, always with promises of more. He told me to order a couple of suits of clothes, which I badly wanted, and he would pay the bill. So I got a friend to recommend me to his tailor and there I got what was needed. That friend was O. B. Clarence. Well, G—— bilked me, and the tailor had to wait for his money, which was eventually paid up. I used to call cabs, as before, and earn sometimes a bob a night, which was blued at the coffee-stalls. Whenever I had enough to pay the old woman at Stratton Street, I did so, always finding the breakfasts set out in a row. Then came a spell of wet weather, and I slept at my digs, cutting off the breakfasts, as I could not pay for them. One night, after having been out all day without earning a bob I was walking down the Strand on my way towards Waterloo Bridge. It was raining, and I was hungry, having had nothing since the night before. Having passed the Adelphi Theatre, the smell of food assailed my nostrils. It emanated from Harris's sausage-shop. I gazed in at the window at the steaming succulent sausages. It was too much of a temptation. Now I knew I possessed exactly one shilling, I was sure of that. There have been times when I could not guess within ten thousand pounds what my bank-balance was. I might have been overdrawn, for all I knew. But when one has got down to a bob, one does not make mistakes. I did own a bob. So in I went to the warm food-smelling room. A girl handed me the price-list. A steak with potatoes, etc., came to 10d., leaving 2d. for the girl. So I ordered the steak. It was placed before me, and the chit for the money. But first I had a mouthful. Then I put my hand in one pocket, my trouser-pocket; then in the other. Horror! The shilling was not there. I knew I had not exaggerated my estate. Then I *remembered*. The shilling was in the extra pair of trousers pressing under my mattress in Stratton Street. I told the girl I would settle at the end. I delayed the end as long as I could. But the steak had lost its savour. I finished. I got up and crossed to Mr. Harris, or his deputy. "I owe a shilling, but I have not got it with me, but I will leave you my waistcoat as a pledge." I took off my coat and my waistcoat, which I handed across the counter, put on my coat, and trudged home over the bridge. The shilling was there all right. So back to Harris's, and my waistcoat redeemed. It was a bad night, and I was sopping wet. The theatres were just disgorging. Hansoms were at a premium. A young toff about my own age called to me: "Get me a cab, fellow!" And the fellow did, after some trouble, and the young toff gave me three coppers. "Don't you think it's worth more than three coppers?" I asked. "It's all the change I have," he answered, and drove off. I got another job, I remember, which netted another bob. As I walked away I vowed I would never go down the Strand

again until I was in management at either the Adelphi or the Vaudeville. And the next time I did I was in joint management with Otho Stuart at the Adelphi. And the young toff who gave me the three coppers was present at a supper in my honour in Sydney, 1922, an Australian colonel. I never forget a face, and seldom remember names. Anyhow, I mentioned the matter to him, but he had quite forgotten it.

But to return to the Strand. With the 1s. 3d. I walked over Waterloo Bridge. I was miserably cold, so I turned into a pub on the right-hand side, after crossing the bridge, and had hot rum till I had spent my entire capital. Then home to bed, where I stayed all day, whilst my clothes were hanging out of the window drying. After that, another spell of the Embankment. Or, sometimes, I would walk about most of the night and doze in the sun on the grass as soon as the park was opened. My fellow-dossers were good chaps on the whole, and from them one learnt much. When particularly short of cash, and therefore unable to patronize the coffee-stall, I used to line up at the back entrance of the Grand Hotel, Northumberland Avenue. Here we passed in line and were handed paper parcels, "dips in the lucky-bag", containing some remnant of food, the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Discarded dishes, cast-away cutlets, refused rissoles, etc.—and these we used to carry off and consume alfresco. If I had the money I would watch the play, or doze, at the Oval or Lord's. And when it was wet I spent the day at the Museums or Art Galleries. One can see so much and educate oneself at very little cost in London. It is the aloofness of the people that strikes a stranger and makes him feel lonely. Try and start a conversation, and the addressee regards you as a pickpocket. And I must confess, in those days, I sometimes felt like one. One thing that always aroused my wonder was the green—the, to me as an Australian, unnatural green—of the grass in the parks. And the beauty of the gardens!

Slowly the vacation weeks passed. I had been shadowing G——, and was so persistent at the Hotel Victoria that the porters there smelt a rat. One morning I turned up early. I had met G—— the night before, coming out of a flat in St. James's Street with Barnato and one of the Joels, the one, I think, with whom he had given a wonderful red dinner at the "Savoy" in celebration of a big win on the run of the red at Monte Carlo. G—— had told me to call at nine in the morning. I called just before he was leaving the hotel to catch the morning train to Paris. On inquiring at the office for Mr. G——, a hall-porter put his hand on my shoulder, saying: "Here, get out of this, my man!" I turned round and stouched him on the nose. But I was in no condition for a scrap, for I was ill and run down. Another porter joined in, and I was having

a bad doing when G—— came on the scene and pulled me away. "That's all right," he said to the porters. I went with him to the station. There he pulled out two sovereigns and two half-sovereigns, and, giving me half, 30s., he stepped into the train. I never saw him again. I do not know if he be still in the land of the living. I met his wife, an American actress, years after. They were together when I met him in London. She had made his money for him on the stage in *The Tomboy*. But later on, so she told me, he had deserted her. All Australians will remember him.

With the 30s. I was enabled to rejoin Benson, I think this time at Scarborough. Yes, it was Scarborough, I think, because I was wearing one of my new suits. Hignett and I were digging together, and in the same house were a couple of girls from one of the George Edwardes companies, playing at the other theatre. I had asked them in for supper, and afterwards, one of them, looking at me intensely, said: "How dare you have money?" which, of course, raised a good laugh from Hig. For years after, he would from time to time ejaculate: "How dare you have money?" One tour was very similar to another, so I am not quite certain to which tour certain incidents belong. So much, however, has been written about the old Bensonians that little is left to be said. At the end, I know, of this tour I bargained for and received a three years' engagement at £4 a week for 52 weeks, play or not, £4 10s. per week the next 52 weeks, and £5 a week for the third year. I was rich beyond all hopes. Living never cost Hig and myself more than 20s. a week each. With the rest I could invest in gilt-edged securities! Which, of course, I did not do.

Actors and actresses were always coming and going. I remember Charles Quartermain, Herbert Grimwood, and Angus McLeod, now managing-director of Daniel Myer & Co., all joining, in sailor-boys' straw hats, at Newcastle-on-Tyne.

The next vacation I lived in comfort. I had two small rooms above Wisden's bucket-shop in Cranbourn Street. The landlady was a Frenchwoman, the wife of the *chef* at Covent Garden Hotel. The rooms were furnished neatly and were scrupulously clean. She served me with breakfast every morning, and as her husband used to bring home "perks", my breakfast was varied. A Dover sole, bacon and eggs, a salmon-steak, different nearly every morning, with French bread and butter and most delicious coffee. For all this I paid 10s. a week. I had breakfast at eight, and at 1.30 lunch at the Crown Hotel, Charing Cross Road, where one had soup, fish entrée, or cut from the joint, with two veg., sweet and bread, cheese and butter, a salad *ad lib.*, together with half a pint of stout or bitters for 1s. 3d. Tip to waitress, 3d. = 1s. 6d. On Sundays the landlady charged me 1s. 6d. extra for midday dinner. So that

for exactly £1 os. 6d. one lived well. When I was not watching cricket I was playing cricket, so the vacation was a joy.

On another tour, at Scarborough, I first met Lily Brayton, who had come to interview Benson, unknown to her people. She joined us at Manchester. I was much smitten, and made up my mind she should be my wife. From Manchester to Cork, where she lived with Elsie Kirby, afterwards Mrs. James B. Fagan, Jim being a member of the company. Then one Saturday I asked her if she would go with me the following day to Blarney Castle. She consented. On Sunday morning—it was early January—we started off, one either side of a smart jaunting-car, the most comfortable horse-vehicle in the world, with a spanking Irish mare between the shafts and a human Irish Jarvey. I had packed a brace of roast widgeon and other things, with a bottle of wine. And after lunch we wandered over and through Blarney Castle. There was another couple of lovers there that Sunday, Charles Quartermain and one of the girls. As we looked through a window over the landscape, I proposed, and was accepted. Lil wore, I remember so well, a tartan silk blouse and tweed coat and skirt. When we got back, or, rather, on the Monday, we had to stand the chaff of the company. However, it was settled. We had our quarrels, but we always made it up. I remember once—I was rehearsing her in Juliet, which she was going to play in a company and spec of our own at Wigan. near her birthplace, Hindley, Charles Quartermain and H. R. Hignett to alternate Romeo—she disagreed with one of my readings. We quarrelled, and she put my shoes on the fire. I replied by putting her silver brushes on the fire. Of course, all were rescued. But that was after our marriage, which her mother would not consent to for some time. She very quickly made her mark in the company with her beauty, her wonderful voice, and her dramatic sense. But she was always nervous and had to be encouraged. She gave a great performance of Ophelia when Mrs. Benson was ill, and had a charming letter of congratulation from Ellen Terry, who was present. This was Newcastle, our fate town. For it was in Newcastle that the theatre was burnt down, after a performance of *Macbeth*, and all Benson's scenery and costumes destroyed, just before his London season at the Lyceum. Sir Henry Irving came to his rescue and lent him all he required. I doubt if any of the present-day commercial managers would be so obliging and generous. Why should they? Irving was a great gentleman!

It was at Newcastle-on-Tyne that the contract was signed to take over His Majesty's Theatre, London, for *Attila* and *As You Like It*. And here, also, was fixed up the agreement for us to go to Australia in 1909. But I am anticipating.

We were married in Hindley one June day, and travelled to

Stratford-on-Avon for our honeymoon, and we spent and worked many, many happy years together. We had taken part the previous summer in the Stratford-on-Avon's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations, which for so small a town were truly magnificent. And we spent most of our vacation there, boating on the river and cycling. It was at Stratford-on-Avon, before I was married, that I was called early one morning to go to the theatre at once. There I was accused of having, the previous night, climbed over one of the alderman's walls, purloined the flags that were decorating his house for the birthday, and draping them round the statue of Henry V in the Memorial Theatre garden. I was perfectly innocent, but the cricket pro., who should have known me, swore to my identity. He saw me climb over the wall. It was not until the real culprit confessed that I was exonerated. And who was the culprit? That very clever and favourite London actor, Mr. H. O. Nicholson! A very staid, middle-aged gentleman these days, but then, oh, dear! what a lad! Always in every trouble. And his boon companion, O. B. Clarence was as bad, and now equally staid. I remember once going into the Eldorado Club, an old night-club in London, with O. B. Clarence. In the bar was Frank Slavin. That was after his defeat by Peter Jackson, which I was fortunate enough to see at the National Sporting Club. "Hullo, Frank!" "Hullo, Oscar!" we greeted each other. "What will you have to drink?" said Frank. "And what will our little man here?"—indicating Clarence, who was always a light-weight. "Don't you 'little man' me," said Clarty, as we all called him, "or I'll give you a jab in the neck." And even when I explained to Clarty who it was, he was still for "jabbing him". It was this spirit that made him such a good half-back at rugby. Playing against a Cork team on a very muddy field, two Irishwomen were spectators. Now Clarty, with his thin flaxen hair and pink-and-white complexion and blue eyes, was a model for a cherub. "Och! look at the beautiful little angel! Shure he'll be killed!" "He ought to be at home." "Oh, the sweet child!" And so on. Presently Clarty dived for the ball, was tackled and grassed, or, rather, muddled and blooded. Up he got, his face a mass of blood and mud, and from his lips poured a torrent of abuse about the foul he alleged had been committed. The two Irishwomen were disillusioned. The angel-faced boy was human, after all. They left the ground.

I was, at the time of my marriage, playing all the leading parts after Benson. Brutus, King Claudius, etc. In all I must have played over one hundred parts in Shakespearian plays.

I think I had taken part in nine memorial weeks at Stratford-on-Avon and in the summer I always made it my home, living in a cottage attached to the "Black Swan" overlooking the memorial

gardens and the river. I think those days were about the happiest of my life. We all got frightfully excited as April drew near and we started rehearsing the birthday production. And as soon as the train pulled up at the station, off we would all troop to the Shakespearian Hotel. Here we would be greeted cheerfully by Miss Nancy Justins and Miss Bailey. Miss Justins was the daughter of the proprietor and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Justins. They greeted us more sedately, but Nancy was an out-and-out Bensonian. Now she is the lady mayoress of Stratford-on-Avon. Well, after our greetings we used to have a spot, as we called it. And here in the little cosy bar, where Bensonians always felt they had a right to have their seats reserved, we would foregather every night and exchange remembrances with old members who had come down to the festival with critics who came year after year. There was no early-closing in those old days. Old Mrs. Justins would toddle off to bed, and Mr. Justins would beg us to go. But Nancy, bless her! would say: "They're all right, Dad," and so well into the next morning we would quaff our sack. Every actor of any name or note has at some time or other foregathered there. That little bar held the Benson soul. And though it has all been altered it must still flutter round about that hallowed spot.

On the eve of one of the birthnight productions we were all gathered together after the show after midnight. Teddie Lyall Swete, Stenhouse, Hignett, myself, and among others a man called Harrison, a friend of the Bensons. He was called "Parnell's Stripling", a fine athlete. Well, Swete suggested we should all go down to the river and swim. Now, as it was a very cold night and pouring with rain, the proposition was naturally seconded and carried unanimously. Mr. Justins had not gone to bed. He tried to persuade us against such madness. We asked for towels. He would not lend them. He begged with tears in his eyes to listen to reason. Nancy also tried to slip in. But out we went into the pouring rain, down to the Memorial Theatre, hopped over the gate, and went to the river steps. Here we stripped, or some of us did, others cried off and lit matches at the bank to show us where to land. It was pitch-dark. It was icy-cold, and we did not go in for any fancy swimming. Just in and out. Then came the question of drying ourselves. I used my shirt and carried it after. Teddie Swete got a brain-wave. He would roll on the turf. Of course, he had forgotten it had been raining for hours and hours. So he threw himself down and rolled—in the gravel. He was a nasty mess next day. Then we heard old Justins calling over the gate. We expected the police, and ran. Hignett, who hated swimming, had gone home. I followed fairly respectfully dressed. All except the proposer of the scheme, Swete, were fit as fiddles next day. *He* had gravel rash. On the



[Photograph by Monte Luke

AS "SIR JOHN FALSTAFF"

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Sunday between the two weeks we always went for a picnic up the river, wet or fine, hot or cold. And on Shakespeare's birthday it was the unwritten law that all Bensonians donned for the summer a straw hat. For years after leaving the Benson Company I still put on my straw on the 23rd April. In fact, right up to April, 1922. On the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee, 1897, Stratford-on-Avon celebrated the occasion with a procession representing all the plays of Shakespeare and his characters. This was organized by Henry Jalland, Benson's manager, and I gave a helping hand. There was a horse-drawn lorry for each play. On each lorry a well-known scene was depicted. The characters not in that scene preceded the lorry in procession. The characters were impersonated by the inhabitants, and great were the heart-burnings. Two ladies, daughters of the caretaker of Shakespeare's new place, objected to the parts they were cast for. They considered they should have had more important rôles, considering all that Pa had done for Shakespeare. Miss Brayton, I think, was Helena in *The Dream*. I was the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice*. It was a very hot day and the town was crammed, jammed. The trippers called me Sambo. I was terribly disgusted. I thought I was very dignified. I was glad when it was over. In the afternoon some of us played a farce called *My Turn Next* before several hundred children who were having tea in a marquee. They took no notice of our efforts whatever, and we could not hear ourselves speak, for the little beasts kept up Kentish fire with their tea-spoons on their saucers, at the same time calling: "Tea! Tea! Tea! teacher! Cake! Cake! Cake! teacher!" It was a terrible fiasco. Thank Heaven no critics were present, or our careers would have been blasted.

Dear old Stratford-on-Avon! You are nothing like the same as of old. The hideous motor traffic had not spoilt your countryside. One could bike down your pretty lanes without meeting a motor-coach full of drunken trippers. The only blessing is that the Americans did not buy the whole concern and cart it over to America. Certainly they do contribute to the funds by visiting the shrine in their thousands. I wonder why! They do not speak his language. And the river has been spoilt with motor-launches. Old Davis and his son were well-known to all Bensonians. Each of us used to rent a boat for the fortnight whether we could afford it or not. After leaving the Benson Company I have visited Stratford-on-Avon, I think, either three or four times to play during the Memorial Celebration. Once Lil and I and the entire company went down and played *The Taming of the Shrew*, and another time *Othello*. I also played Shylock and Sir John Falstaff there, with the Benson Company. When they build the new theatre there,

towards which, I understand, a sum of £275,000 has been subscribed, I do hope an actor of experience will be consulted as to the stage portion of the building. I have seen the design for the new theatre. What do you think of it, old Bensonians? Does it exhale the Shakespearian Stratford-on-Avon atmosphere? To me it seems to emanate the Kaiser.

Once this marrying business started, it spread. Hignett shortly after married, as did several other of the last-ditchers. During our honeymoon at dear old Stratford-on-Avon, Lil and I built many castles in the air. And many of them came true. Others——!

CHAPTER SEVEN

Still Bensonian

AFTER our honeymoon we rejoined Benson. I suppose at that time Lil was getting two pounds a week and I seven. We had a very happy time of it, each helping the other by criticism of one's work, and we seemed content to stay on with Benson for ever. We were at the Theatre Royal, Newcastle. We had played *Macbeth* the previous night. The servant came into our room early in the morning and told us that the theatre had been burnt down. We were quickly dressed and on the spot. True, the theatre had been gutted and all scenery, costumes, properties belonging to Benson, of a value to him of about £10,000, gone in smoke. Also all the belongings of the artistes as regards make-up, wigs, etc. It was a bad blow, because we were to open at the Lyceum, London, for a twelve-weeks' season, and, of course, London was our Mecca. However, Benson, never defeated, rushed off to London. In the meantime it was arranged to give a matinée performance of *The Merchant of Venice* with borrowed dresses and scenery at the Byker Theatre on Saturday. Holders of tickets for the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday performances, cancelled by fire, were informed by advertisement that they could either use their tickets for this matinée of *The Merchant*, or have their money back. And then happened the champion deadhead story: Mr. Jalland, business manager, received the following letter.

DEAR SIR,

Mr. Benson kindly sent me two complimentary seats for Friday night's performance of *Macbeth*. As this cannot take place and as I cannot avail myself of the offer to see *The Merchant of Venice* at Byker on Saturday afternoon, I shall be greatly obliged if you will forward me the value of these seats, viz., 10s. With regrets for Mr. Benson's great loss.

Yours truly,

Of course, Newcastle is not so far from Scotland!
As I have mentioned before, Sir Henry Irving came to the

rescue and placed his entire stock of scenery, wardrobe and properties at Benson's service. A true knight indeed ! Well, we opened at the Lyceum in *Henry V.* In this production Isidora Duncan appeared in a dance of temptation before the Dauphin. Her dancing in those days was very amateurish and she certainly did not possess any attraction : plain and dowdy. I played Pistol, and the critics praised me. This was followed by the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Lil made a tremendous hit as Helena, which she repeated as Olivia in *Twelfth Night*. Archer and others raved about the richness of her voice and pure elocution. That made her. I also won my spurs as Claudius in *Hamlet*. However, we were both still under engagement to Benson. I was now getting £8 a week and Lil £3. Then Benson put up *The Tempest* for a run, and as there were no parts for either of us, he sent us to Stratford-on-Avon for the Memorial Week, to support John Coleman in *Pericles* and Hermann Vezin in *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III.* Poor old John Coleman ! He was over seventy, or looked it, and had been retired for years. But he had re-written Shakespeare's *Pericles*, and this was the offering at that year's Festival. The most disgraceful insult to the Bard that the governors of the Memorial Theatre could have perpetrated. In the company were also Lilian Braithwaite, O. B. Clarence, H. O. Nicholson of Benson's Company. Also Thalberg. The production of *Pericles* was a burlesque ! John Coleman pitiable ! He made his first appearance in wrinkled pink (oh, such a pink !), leg, body, and arm fleshing. His sandals protruded by three inches beyond his big toe, so that as he walked he slapped the stage like a nigger dancer. He expected a great welcome on his first appearance. He did not get a hand. So he walked off the stage and made his entrance again. Again there was no applause, and then he dried up, and never spoke a word of his part in that Act. I had to speak them for him, preceding each of the speeches by "You said, my lord"—and so into Pericles's speech. It was a terrible evening. And yet Marie Corelli the next day wrote a most eulogistic notice about him. The same evening, to help matters, O. B. Clarence and H. O. Nicholson, playing the parts of hefty sailors, enacted a scene on the seashore in which they both made gestures of gazing towards the horizon, which should have been represented on the back-cloth. But by mistake they had made their entrance in front of the act-drop, which was an imitation of tapestry, representing Queen Elizabeth visiting the Globe Theatre. Poor Coleman in the prompt corner was calling out : "Come off ! Come off ! You are ruining *my play* !"

He would call Miss Brayton Miss Braybone. There was a scene in which he was cast up on the beach half-drowned. And this is how he described it to Lil. "You enter, followed by your

maidens. You are on your way to the temple of Venus where you are going to sacrifice a pair of white doves to the Goddess of Love. As you cross the stage you see me lying unconscious on the sand. You have never seen such a God-like man in your life. You stop and gaze at me. Your gaze brings me to life. I look up and my eyes meet yours. You see in my wondrous eyes *LOVE*. You stretch out your little hand to me. I rise on one knee and press that lily hand to my parched lips. You flush all over with emotion. You withdraw your hand as a maiden should. And you walk off, your eyes still gazing into mine. You do not utter a word. It is a case of ocular love-making. And it will simply thrill the audience. Then I kneel down and weep with joy."

This is what happened on the night. Lil came on, complete with doves and maidens. She saw John Coleman lying on the stage. He had on a complete suit of pink fleshings which had never been in any sea. Here and there, bits of green seaweed were sewn on it. He had on a pair of green satin trunks and worsted football stockings, also sewn about with green seaweed. On his head, a beautifully curled and oiled yellow wig and a curled up moustache and curly beard surrounded his parched lips. She gazed at him, and he tried to get up but could not so Lil and the maidens raised him. And off she went, ocular love-making and all. And he turned round and prayed. If the audience was not thrilled it certainly trilled with mirth.

After the show we foregathered in the Shakespearian bar, as usual, and John Coleman and Hermann Vezin would join us, and we boys stood them drinks. Each in turn would tell us of his successes. "There was never a Hamlet like mine!" John would exclaim. "There never was and never will be," Vezin would reply. "When I played Macbeth," said Vezin. "Your Macbeth!" John would exclaim, and then, in an audible whisper to those near him: "His Macbeth! My dear boys! Oh, poor Vezin! poor Vezin!"

After the Lyceum season we started off again on our autumn tour, when Lil was engaged by Tree. So she left the Benson nest and went to His Majesty's Theatre, appearing at short notice in Maud Jeffries's part in Stephen Phillips's *Herod*. I continued on tour, and then Benson came to London for another season at the Comedy Theatre. Soon after we started, Queen Victoria died. For a time theatres did badly, and Benson announced the end of his season. But we endeavoured to carry on as a commonwealth for a time, but in the end we had to acknowledge defeat, and the company for the time being disbanded. I shall never forget the last night at the Comedy. Benson was ill! He had been playing with some gastric trouble giving him hell, and his farewell speech

to us and his thanks touched us in the throat. It seemed incredible that this was the end of the Benson Company. It was not. It started again, but it was never the same. Members of the new company had not the same spirit as we of the old brigade. Many of them were too pretty. "Lisping hawthorn buds that smell like Bucklersbury in simple time." We had never had any use for these. If one did stray into the company, he was soon knocked down and set up the right way. When George Weir died there died with him the backbone of the histrionic ability of the Benson Company. Never more his advice—"Let me tell you, laddie——"

And so closed my many years' work with F. R. Benson. I had started at the bottom and risen to the top of his company. For him I have always had, and always shall have, a great admiration and affection, and also for Mrs., now Lady, Benson. The knighting of Benson was a fitting reward for years of hard work. Unlike some honours that have been bestowed, he thoroughly deserved his. There was no seeking for honours in his case. He received this honour at Drury Lane Theatre during the all-star production of *Julius Cæsar* in celebration of Shakespeare's birthday. I was invited to produce it, which I did, but it was very badly acted, actors being chosen for their names to play parts to which they were unsuited. H. B. Irving was an exception. Benson was a great sportsman, a courteous gentleman, whatever his kinks may have been. He was always fighting-fit, in condition to run ten miles at any time of the day or night. His whole heart was always in his work, and if he failed to attain the highest place in his art, it was because he had never had the proper training. There was never anyone to stage-manage him, and rid him of his faults of speech and gesture. He had great ideas and inspired conceptions of parts, but he could not, as the saying now is, put it across. He could always help others; himself he could not help. Yet I have seen him give three great performances. One as Hamlet in Waterford, Ireland; one as Malvolio (perhaps his best part), in Dublin, and as Richard II at the final dress-rehearsal at Stratford-on-Avon. He was ever seeking to do things better. He was a gambler. If he made money on a tour, he would spend it all to make the productions the following tour on a higher scale. At sports he was the leading spirit. At hockey I think he was at his best, and scored a lot of goals mainly through individual play. Although a good swimmer, he could not stand much cold in the water, and after a game of water-polo would be as blue as his costume. But he always stuck it to the end. We swam across Lake Windermere in its widest part one cold morning, he, one George Fitzgerald, and myself. Although I reached the other side many hundred yards in front of him, he was still plugging on, though frozen to an icicle. I have known him

purposely miss a train on a Sunday so as to oblige him to run and walk to his destination thirty or forty miles away. In his seventieth year he walked a distance of 45 miles in nine hours—pretty good going. Well, here's to you, sir; and many thanks for many happy years. And to you, Lady Benson, one of the best!

Of the members of the company I knew, many have gone, but playgoers throughout England will remember them: George R. Weir, *the* best of Shakespearian clowns; A. E. George; Alfred Brydone; Frank Rodney; Alice Denvil (what a Mrs. Malaprop and Mistress Quickley!); Henry Jalland; George Hipsley; William Mollison; Louis Calvert; Arthur Whitby, and many more. Mollison was a fine virile Macbeth. He lacked a few inches in height. Otherwise he would have sat in the seats of the mighty. Most of them have their memories perpetuated in the Benson Memorial Window at Stratford-on-Avon. Of those still in the fray many have won their way to the top, both in America and England. Walter Hampden, a big star in America, to mention only one there; Basil Rathbone, Freddie Worlock, also Yankees now; Matheson Lang, a fine actor and one of the few remaining actor-managers, who must be the sheet-anchor of the theatrical profession; Graham Brown, looking as cheerily impertinent as in the old days; O. B. Clarence, H. R. Hignett, H. O. Nicholson, Lyall Swete, a good Bensonian, and others like Cedric Hardwick, after my time.

But of all those who joined the Benson Company, one stands out as having had all the gifts of looks, voice and temperament showered upon him—Henry Ainley. He should have been at the head of our art. He was the finest Shakespearian juvenile I have ever seen—his Orlando was perfect, and he would have been the finest Romeo and possibly Hamlet of his day or his century. He wanted producing. He could not produce himself. He had his opportunities time after time to take the lead, but almost at the start of his London career an evil fate seemed to dog him. I saw him in *The Great Adventure* and in *Quinneys*—admirable performances both, but he should have been striding the stage as a Colossus. He had not the Irving nor the Forbes-Robertson mental magnetism, but he had the voice, the vitality, the mien, the looks of George Righold, Kyrle Bellew, Lewis Waller all in one for such parts as they excelled in. Unfortunately, illness has laid him aside for the time, but before these lines are published I hope, and all Bensonians and those who love the dramatic art, hope that he will once more be in the running, and running well.

In the Benson company of the old days it was the custom to criticize each other's performance frankly. But it was always

constructive criticism. One would point out, and have pointed out to one, where the fault lay and how it could be remedied. Whether it was in make-up, gesture, wrong emphasis or mispronunciation, it would surely be pointed out. And we thanked our critics, and were thanked in turn.

And that was why the Benson Company was such a good school. Of Benson, here are a couple of stories or so typical of his absent-mindedness. In Dublin a dignitary of the Church was having lunch with him, and both were engaged in a keen argument. The dish was crumbed cutlets garnished with parsley. The dish was in front of Benson. The Churchman having finished one cutlet held his plate out for more. There were no servants, being a private house. Benson continuing the argument placed a piece of parsley in the held-out plate. Then as it was still held out another piece and yet another until no garnishing was left. Then looking at the plate covered with parsley and still held out, he stopped his speech and said—"Do you really wish any more?" It was Mrs. F. R. Benson who told me this.

This happened at Hull. We had been playing the local team at water polo and beaten them well. The baths were crowded. Included in the spectators were all the ladies of the Benson company and May Yoké and all the ladies from her company. After the game was over, there were calls for me, having scored five goals out of the six, and a call for Benson to make a speech. After a pause he emerged from his cubicle. He had taken off his swimming costume. He had overlooked this. There he stood holding up a bath towel with which he was wiping his face, the other end hanging mercifully in front of him. He began to speak and as he spoke he gave signs that he was going to gesticulate. Then Mrs. Benson called out "Frank". Frank stopped. Someone whispered in his ear. Then he realized. "Oh, I'm so sorry," said he, and he threw the towel round his loins, and as he did so there was a shriek of "Oh, Frank!" from May Yoké.

We were playing pastoral. *Twelfth Night* was the play and the place the Cathedral grounds at York. It was in the evening, and the limelights had failed, so Benson tried to light the stage with bicycle lamps and flares. The lighting was not a great success. Benson putting on his overcoat over his Malvolio costume went round and stood at the back of the audience to see the effect. A man standing near him had paid a shilling for admission and was grumbling because he could not see anything. Benson turned to him and said: "Well, if you don't like it *give me your shilling and go!*"

He had quite a pretty wit, too. One night at Cork we were playing *Hamlet*. E. Lyall Swete was ill, and was suffering

from toothache or some ache or other. However, he had listened to everybody's advice, had taken first one thing and then another, whisky, brandy, aspirin, etc., until he was doped. Mrs. Benson was trying to soothe him. She turned to me. "Get my smelling salts, Bubbles (her nickname for me)!" I brought them and pulled out the stopper and held the bottle to his nose. I suppose he thought it was something to take. Anyhow, he put out his tongue, and I couldn't resist it. I poured some of the contents on it. But it brought him round, more or less. The next day Benson sent a message to Swete hoping he had, "recovered from his *remedies*."

As already stated we played all kinds of games, and sometimes, especially at football, we had to rope in an outsider to make up the team. On one occasion we were playing a regimental team stationed at Cork a game of soccer. We were a man short. Benson roped in Dan Horgan, the brother of the theatre manager. Dan was a very fast runner and a good all-round athlete, but the only football he had played was under the Gaelic code, the rules of which somewhat resemble those of the American code. One player can kill another as long as no weapon is used. Well, the game started. Dan Horgan was more than useless, getting in everybody's way, handling the ball, and started fighting for it. At last the outside right forward of the Tommies got the ball on his own and started a dribble. There was only myself, the goalkeeper, between him and the net. Dan who was, as I have mentioned, very fast, sprinted after him. As he neared him he sprang, landed with his knees on the man's back and brought him to earth. Then he seized him by the scruff of the neck and proceeded to rub and beat his face on the ground which, fortunately, was very muddy. I had cleared the goal by kicking over the line. I ran up to Horgan but Benson was first. He pulled Horgan off the man, who was too dazed to say anything. "You must not do that, Dan," said Benson. "I'm sorry, sir," said Dan in the richest of brogues, "but I was so b——y anxious."

Before my marriage, as I have already mentioned, Hignett and I "digger" together, taking it in turns to do the catering. We were playing at Bedford and it was my turn to do the shopping. I noticed a very nice saddle of Welsh mutton in a butcher's. So I went in and asked the price, found I had not enough money to pay for it and therefore asked the butcher would he mind keeping it as we did not require it for a couple of days. I told Hignett about it. He objected to the price, which really was more than we could afford. So we decided not to have it. The next time I walked past the shop there was the saddle newly-floured and garnished with a "Sold" label on it. After that I used to walk another way. For *we* never bought the saddle.

At the Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, Benson was putting on a new production of *Macbeth*. Great care had been taken, especially in the battle scenes at the end of the play. I was playing Ross and in the attack on Macbeth's castle I was in command. There stood the solid gates barred against us. To the sound of trumpets I led my men on and pointed with my sword at the gates. At this signal eight men appeared carrying the battering ram, a huge log of wood with a carved ram's head on the end. This was suspended from their hands by ropes. They approached the castle with it and swung it once, twice, thrice, and crashed it again and again upon the gates. They eventually splintered. I waved my sword and the army, consisting of about forty supers, entered through the breach to slaughter the defenders. Now, all this worked very well at the final rehearsal. The first night was on Saturday, when it is the custom in Edinburgh, Glasgow and other Scotch cities for the majority of the inhabitants to get drunk. When we came to this castle scene I entered, the trumpet blazed out their defiance, and the eight men with the battering ram approached the castle. Now at the head of the attacking army of supers was a man gloriously, triumphantly drunk. He saw my sword pointing at the gates. He knew he had to go through those gates. And he started. He staggered past me and past the ram men who had just started their first swing. He got between them and the gates. He looked at them. He looked at the gates, then he opened those ponderous gates wide with the tips of his fingers. At the same moment the ram swung thrice and crashed. The ram's head caught him in the rear, lifted him into the air six feet, and down he came with a yell and his forty drunken fellow-soldiers trampled over his prostrate body.

It was also at the Lyceum that we were playing *Julius Cæsar* one Saturday evening. There had been the final of the Scotch Cup I think played that day, between the Hibernians and the Hearts of Midlothian. We had had a *matinée* and were not leaving the theatre between the shows. I was playing Brutus, Hignett Metullus Cimba and we were both dressing in the same room. Our dresser, whom we had let off during the *matinée* to see the match, returned in a beautiful condition. We asked him the result. "The Hibs won," he said, "by 3 goals to 1." Five minutes afterwards he corrected himself—"No, the Hearts won by 3 goals to 1." Still later he contradicted himself again. As I was now due to make my first entrance—Hignett had already gone—I said to the man, "You had better get a paper and let me know the correct result on the stage! I was about to utter the final words which end the first act in Brutus's Orchard, holding Portia in my arms. I had got as far as, "O ye Gods render me worthy—" when I heard

a titter from the audience and was conscious of someone at my elbow. I turned. It was the dresser with the paper. And he spoke as clearly as he was capable of doing, "The Hibs beat the Hearts by 3 goals to 1!" Curtain!

We had a man in the company, Stenhouse, a very good fellow and a good athlete, but an atrociously bad actor. He used to portray one of the guests in the banquet scene in Macbeth when the Ghost of Banguo appears. He used to gum on a very bad *crêpe* hair beard. One night during this scene, whilst Benson was talking aside to the murderers, Hignett and some others and myself crumbled up the brown bread which constituted our *feast*; and flicked rolled-up pellets at Stenhouse until his beard was as thick with them as with hairs. The cue came for the Ghost of Banguo to appear. It sat next Stenhouse. Benson, as Macbeth, approached the table, and pointing his finger at Banguo's Ghost and shrinking back cried: "Which of you have done this?" Now, Stenhouse thought the pointing finger and question was directed at him. He rose and turned to Benson, "Sorry, sir, but it's not my fault." At Manchester we were playing *Julius Cæsar*, Louis Calvert, a most earnest actor, was Brutus. O. B. Clarence and I were playing Varro and Claudius in the tent scene. Before the curtain went up Calvert turned to us and said "Don't cod to-night, boys, I'm inspired." That finished him. When Brutus cried out after the exit of Cæsar's ghost, "Varro, Claudius, fellow thou awake," Clarence and I rose and faced Calvert and in one eye, the blind one to the audience, we each had a monocle. But he asked for it.

When we were playing in Liverpool the entire company was invited to supper with a gentleman, an art patron who lived at Birkenhead. He was a very wealthy man and had a house full of priceless pieces. It was a cold crossing on the ferry and, being healthy young people, we had good appetites. We arrived and sat down to supper. Supper! I think those who had accepted numbered about thirty. There were sponge cakes, bread and butter and jam, biscuits of various sorts and soft drinks, not even beer. *And he had provided a cold chicken in case anyone was hungry.* Of course, dear old Benson didn't mind at all. He could go on preaching about anything for hours on nothing more sustaining than an egg-shell. We had been shown many of his treasures before we sat down. I don't know who had any chicken, or who had anything. We were furious and none more so than Wally Graham Browne who, by accident, by *pure accident*, knocked against a table on which stood a most precious Chinese vase. And the Chinese vase fell to the ground and was broken into a score of pieces. Of course we were all *terribly upset*. The supper had cost something, after all. We always fought shy of such invitations afterwards.

In Ireland we always had a good time. At Limerick we were playing *Twelfth Night* at night as a pastoral. A stage had been erected between a grove of trees, and the floor was covered with mown grass from a lawn to about four inches in depth. H. O. Nicholson, who was playing Feste had an accident. His false teeth dropped out and fell in the middle of the stage and into the mown grass, which completely buried them. Word was passed round that Nick had lost his teeth, and everyone who went on the stage used to grab up a handful of the grass, hoping to recover them. We thought of nothing else. But no one found them until after the play was over when they were discovered undamaged. But it must have puzzled the audience why we one and all grabbed a handful of mown grass before making an exit. Perhaps they thought we ate grass.

The Irish jarvie was always a joy. There is a tale told of one who drove Sir Henry Irving round Dublin to show him the sights. He pulled up and pointed out Trinity College. Then in a mysterious whisper he said: "An' if ye'll believe me, ye honour, there are two thousand bhoys trained there every night, all fully armed and equipped, ready to rise at a minute's notice. Gee up!" And as he drove to the Customs House. Here he again pulled up. "That's the Customs House, ye honour, and if ye'll believe me behind there are five thousand bhoys trained every night, all fully armed and equipped, ready to rise at a minute's notice. Gee up!" And off he drove to Phoenix Park where he again pulled up. "And this is Phoenix Park where the accident took place, and if ye'll believe me, ye honour, there are ten thousand bhoys being trained here every night, all fully armed and equipped, ready to rise at a minute's notice." "And why don't they rise?" asked Sir Henry. "S-sh!" whispered the jarvie, "the police won't let them."

I think it must have been the same jarvie who drove me from the theatre to the hotel some years later. I did not know what the fare was, either 9d. or 1s. So I asked for information. "Well, it's like this," said the jarvie. "I drove Sir Henry Irving the same journey a fortnight ago, and he gave me five shillings, and you're a damned sight finer actor than ever he was."

If I have not mentioned Mrs., now Lady, Benson very often in my reminiscences of the Benson Company it is not through lack of appreciation. Even in those days when we could not be bothered with women, Mrs. Benson was always looked upon as one of the boys. She was a good sport and a staunch friend. Not catty as so many hiding ladies become, but always ready to help anyone. Many years ago there was instituted a yearly Bensonian dinner.

To this dinner only men were admitted. It was often suggested that women members past and present should be allowed to be present. It never met with any support. But I would make one exception—Lady Benson. She would add to the gaiety of the table, and to the grace of the occasion. And I'm not Irish! Sir Frank and Lady Benson—"Skaal!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

Under Tree's Management and New York

TREE announced the production of *Twelfth Night*, and Lil was to play Viola, and not Desdemona in *Othello*, which Tree had originally intended. An effort was made in a certain quarter to supplant her, but eventually wiser counsels prevailed, and so she appeared in the part and made a tremendous success. And as Tree, as Malvolio, gave one of his best Shakespearian performances, and Lionel Brough as Sir Toby, Norman Forbes as Aguecheek, Courtice Pounds as Feste, Cicely Richards as Maria, and Maud Jeffries as Olivia, all scored; and as the production was full of sunshine and joy, the whole thing was an artistic and financial success. Shortly after, Tree engaged me for three years. I was playing in Ireland with him when, at a request from Pinero, he released me to play Maldonado in *Iris*, at the Garrick Theatre. This was a great stroke of luck for me, and a great compliment, as both Arthur Bouchier and Edmund Maurice had been rehearsed and found unsuitable. So it was with some trepidation I started to rehearse.

The first rehearsal, Pinero was pleased. The second, he began to pull me up, without letting me go through a scene. I took objection to this and offered to resign; but Pinero was most kind to me, and so were both public and Press. At the same time, round the corner, or perhaps a little later, Lil was playing in *The Twin Sister* with H. B. Irving.

I went later on to New York to play Maldonado under Charles Frohman's management. But of that hereafter.

I think my first part with Tree was as Antinous in Phillips's *Ulysses*. I also undertook the production of this, three weeks before the opening. Tree had had a row with a Mr. Nielson, M.P., who was producing, and the M.P. walked out. Now *Ulysses* was a very heavy production and was behindhand, and I had to work hard. Tree never seemed inclined to work till after midnight. I know that the few days preceding production I was on His Majesty's stage from 12 noon till 6.30 the following morning. Tree would look in just before lunch for about ten minutes. His next appearance would be about nine, after dinner. He would then rehearse for two hours, and then to supper. At 1 a.m. he would

turn up again, fresh and cheery, and say: "Come, let's do some *work*!" In connection with *Ulysses* Phillips did a bit of leg-pulling at the expense of one Lionel Hart, Mr. Tree's secretary. It appeared that Mr. Hart referred to me in most complimentary terms as a producer, whereupon Phillips remarked it was a pity I was a drunkard. Hart exclaimed: "Good Lord! is he?" Phillips turned to Henry Dana for support. Dana pursed his lips and said: "I'm afraid so." Hart then expressed his intention of keeping near me with hot coffee at rehearsals. The first inkling I had of anything wrong was when Hart kept on offering me coffee one rehearsal. I knew Phillips of old, so I went to him and asked for the story, and he told me: "You're a drunkard, Oscar, so you must keep it up." Hart or his wife never left my side. Now, I think it was one of the last two dress-rehearsals. I arrived one morning in Tree's dressing-room, Percy Anderson, Henry Dana, Tree and Phillips present. I had bought a megaphone on my way down Regent Street, and I showed it to Tree. It would save my voice. Instead of having to yell out, I merely had to speak in an ordinary voice. The megaphone had never been used in the theatre for rehearsals up to then. "Don't let Hart see that," cried Phillips. "Hide it." Well, I hid it under my seat, the centre seat of the first dress-circle row. The dress-rehearsal began. I was in my seat. Behind me Mrs. Hart, with coffee. Now during that day Hart had remarked to Phillips that "Asche seemed all right". Phillips shrugged his shoulders, adding: "I should not be surprised if he gets the megaphone to-day." "What's that?" asked Hart. "A kind of madness. He runs amok and destroys things. It always starts by him speaking in an unearthly voice." "Good God!" said Hart. "And the chief has £10,000 at stake!"

The rehearsal started, and proceeded without halt or fault till the Hades scene. This was a most weird, impressive scene, with Coleridge-Taylor's music. Tree entered at the back, in armour, descending a long flight of steps, past mysterious lights and voices. The house, of about 400 people, was stilled to silence. But the lights were wrong, and I saw Tree was getting nervy. It must begin again. Then I suddenly bethought me of the megaphone. I reached under the seat, seized it, and put it to my mouth. "Stop!" I bellowed forth. There was a flutter, and even Tree started. "Stop, Mr. Tree!" I called. "Stop!" "Good God, what's that?" whispered Hart, who was sitting next to Phillips in the front row of the stalls. "As I told you, Asche has got the *megaphone*. Look out!" Hart rushed through the pass door, on to the stage, let down the iron curtain, seized Tree by the arm and ran him up to his dressing-room, saying: "Asche has got the megaphone, Asche has got the megaphone." Inside the room, he

shut and locked the door, and fell in a faint on the sofa. We often used to laugh about the story after. The same megaphone was in use years after, by both Mr. Bellew and Mr. Cecil King. But of all those in that spoof—Tree, Percy Anderson, Henry Dana, Stephen Phillips and Lionel Hart and myself, all but I are dead.

Tree always loved a joke. He told me how, during the rehearsals of *Herod*, he asked Phillips to accompany him down to Brighton, hear his part on the journey and have lunch at "The Old Ship". "As long as we have a compartment to ourselves," said Phillips. This was arranged, and all went well till the train pulled up at Brighton. Phillips opened the window, nodded to someone, and sat down again. The guard opened the door, and Tree stepped on to the platform, into the arms of a couple of policemen. "What is the meaning of this?" asked Tree. "Come along quietly," said the officer of the law. "But you don't know who I am," persisted Tree. "I am Herbert Beerbohn Tree." "That's so, but come along!" So to the police-station they all drove, when matters were put right, but I believe it cost Tree a fiver. Phillips had sent a wire to the Brighton Police, purporting to come from Scotland Yard: "Am bringing down dangerous lunatic, imagines he is Beerbohm Tree." It was Tree who told me this one day when dining with him and Phillips at Simpson's in the Strand. He was a wonderful codder himself, and delighted in harmless jokes. And often he would carry these jokes on to the stage. We were playing Tolstoi's *Resurrection*. In the last scene, in which I played Simonson, I was warming my hands by a fire in the snow upstage. Tree had a scene of a few lines only with a young Cossack officer who was relating his amorous adventures. Now this particular actor was always "peculiar" on Saturday nights, but Tree did not sack him because he amused him. The Cossack had a final sentence to say before his exit. It was: "I knew a girl once in Kausan, a Hungarian, but with eyes like a Persian cat and the style of a duchess." This was my cue to come down to Tree and have a three-minute scene with him. On this particular Saturday night, our Mr. Cossack was, as usual, Saturday nightish, and he delivered his final lines thus: "I knew a girl once in Kausan, a Hungarian, but with eyes like a butterfly's"—and off he went. Tittering in front of the house. Tree, with his back to the audience, repeating in a whisper: "Eyes like a butterfly's." Well, he cracked me up and we finished the scene abruptly in laughter. I went to him afterwards and told him he ought to sack the man, because I could not afford to break up on the stage. However, he would not do so. Therefore I threatened, if it occurred again, I would walk off the stage.

Well, the following Saturday night the man was more peculiar than ever before. He came to the line, "but with eyes like a



AS BOLINGBROKE IN "RICHARD II"

(Facing page)

Persian——” and halted. “All right to-night,” I thought ; “he *can* only say *cat*,” but he did *not*. He said “Carpet”. “Eyes like a Persian *carpet*.” The house roared and I made a silent exit, leaving it for Tree to fill in the minutes by himself before Miss Lena Ashwell could be called from her room. That night the man *was* sacked.

Tree released me from this part to go and play lead with Ellen Terry at the Old Imperial, first as Sigurd in *The Vikings* and afterwards as Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*. After her season I rejoined Tree. Toward the end of the run of *Ulysses* Tree decided to revive *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, with Lily Hanbury and Mrs. Tree as the two wives and Lily Brayton as Anne Page. But dear Lily Hanbury had a nervous breakdown and had to resign. “What shall we do now, Asche?” said Tree, during his change in the property-room in the last act. Quite jokingly I suggested Ellen Terry and Madge Kendal. He looked at me. “Yes! yes!” Anyhow, after the show that night Tree motored to Mrs. Kendal’s house in Portland Place. She consented to play if she had choice of parts. She chose Mistress Ford. Then Tree motored down to Winchelsea, where Ellen Terry had a house. Yes, she would play, but must play Mistress Page. So all was clear sailing, Mrs. Tree playing Anne Page. It was an all-star caste. I have not my books by me, so cannot be quite sure of the caste, relying on my memory. Besides Tree, Ellen Terry, Madge Kendal, Mrs. Tree, there was Cicely Richards, Courtice Pounds, Lionel Brough, Julian Lestrangle, Henry Kemble, Gerald Lawrence, and myself as Master Ford. I produced it for Tree, and it played to sensational business, Ellen Terry making a personal triumph. Some of the critics the day after were rather “had”. They referred to Miss Terry as having been guilty of an amusing slip in saying : “I cannot remember what the *dickens* his name is”, etc. She said it so naturally that it deceived them. Of course she was speaking text, “What the dickens” not being a reference to the great Charles, but to the devil.

Later on I produced *Richard II* for Tree, cutting the text and arranging the scenes and rehearsing the company. Tree as Richard, myself as Bolingbroke, Haviland as Mowbray, Brandon Thomas as John of Gaunt, Lyn Harding as York, Basil Gill as Aumerle, Lionel Brough as the Gardener, and Lily Brayton as the Queen. On the first night, in the lists scene, just as I was about to make my exit, there was a nasty moment. I had a different horse from the one I had rehearsed with. He had been a bit nervous when I rode on. He did not like the noise and the lights, nor his trappings. However, having said part of my farewell speech to Gaunt, I mounted my steed. I was in complete armour and my visor closed. I got well

into the saddle, reins in my left hand. I had armoured gauntlets on. I leant forward in my stirrups to take my lance from my esquire. It was 12 to 15 feet long and weighed over 10 lbs. Having secured it, and back in my seat, something happened to Mr. Horse. I think my rowel tickled or pricked him. Anyhow, he started by jumping backwards. Presently with his quarters he struck the barrier before the Royal Pavilion, reared up and turned a somersault. I could only just see through the slits in my visor. I threw my heavy lance free, managed, by good luck, to get my armoured feet out of the stirrups without my spurs catching in the trappings, and as he was about to do his tumbling trick, I threw myself over his near wither and crashed on the stage, but was up with a bound and on my feet, with my helmet off. Tree, in the prompt corner, was watching it, paralysed, but as soon as he saw me on my feet, he rang down the curtain. Then it went up again. By this time I had the horse by the bridle, and was holding Brandon's hand in mine. There was a storm of applause. But it might have been serious. However, some of the facetious critics next day said the horse broke down under my weight, etc. I should have liked to have placed these gentlemen in a like predicament.

Richard II was a great success, Tree giving one of his best performances. During the rehearsals, however, one or two little comedies happened. There was an American, whom we shall call Broughton, attached to Mr. Tree's staff. Tree told me he knew all about lighting and would be useful to me. One day we were rehearsing the Flint Castle scene. Tree was on the castle walls, delivering Richard's lines, and I had, as I thought, lighted his face sufficiently. But he stopped and asked me could he not have more light on his face? I told him I thought there was sufficient. Then he asked Mr. Broughton, who was by my side in the stalls, if *he* could suggest any light that Mr. Asche could not. Broughton turned to me and whispered: "Say, what can I suggest?" "Oh!" I replied in the same tone, "put a black spot lime on him from the O.P. perch." "Say, you," cried Broughton, "on the O.P. perch, put a black spot lime on Mr. Tree's face." Tree looked towards the perch where the limelight man was, and said: "Right here, on my face." A head came round from the perch and asked: "What is a black spot lime?" Broughton turned to me and asked: "What is a black spot lime?" And I replied, so I could be heard by all: "I never heard of a black spot lime till now." Oh, yes, he knew all about lights—as he did about history; but that is another story.

And it was brought about in this way. Broughton was sitting next to me, as usual, sucking a fat cigar, and making the usual nasal

sounds. Lil as the Queen, and Tree as Richard, had played their parting scene, and the Queen was led off by Aumerle (Basil Gill). Then spoke Broughton. "Don't you think, Asche, this play lacks female interest?" He was ever keen on female interest. "Now, if the Queen and Aumerle, two beautiful young creatures, were to go off in a more lover-like fashion, giving the impression to the audience that they would later on marry each other, it would be a nice touch. Is there anything against it?" "Only history," I replied. But he did not care a hang for history. Now, those who saw it will remember that the production ended with a big *tableau vivant*—the coronation of Henry IV. I was playing Henry, late Bolingbroke. This was Tree's own idea, and he grouped the picture himself, and it was most impressive. A deputy took my place on the stage, and I sat in front and watched. At the end of one rehearsal, Broughton turned to me and asked me my opinion of it. "Splendid!" I said, "but rather lacks female interest." "How the hell can you get female interest into a coronation scene?" he exclaimed. "Well," answered I, "I don't like to suggest it to Tree myself, but you might." "What?" asked he. "Well, you see, on Henry IV's right hand are Prince Hal, afterwards the great King Henry V, and Prince John of Lancaster. Now why not introduce some of the young Princesses on the left side of their father, particularly Princess Elizabeth, who was after the great Queen Bess, of Armada fame." This sank in. The following day, when the tableau was done, I was in my place on the throne as Henry. Broughton was in the stalls alone, Tree on the gangway over the orchestra. After the curtain fell to a fanfare of trumpets, Tree had the curtain up again, and turning round to the stalls, spotted Broughton. "How do you like it, Broughton?" Broughton stood up, and cleared his throat or his nose, and spoke. "I think it lacks female interest, Mr. Tree." Tree groaned and slapped his forehead, and looked up to Heaven. "How can you introduce female interest into a coronation scene?" "Well, you see," continued Broughton, repeating me word for word about the young Prince Hal and Lancaster, and ending: "Why not some of the young princesses on Asche's left hand? For instance, Princess Elizabeth of Armada fame?" Tree groaned, "Oh my God" and clutched his head. "Is there anything against that?" demanded Broughton triumphantly. "Only history," I ejaculated from the throne. Tree sprang at me and pointed his accusing finger at me, and there was that well-known twinkle in his blue eyes. "You did this, Asche! You did this!" "My dear chief," I said in an offended voice, "I have been sitting here all the time." "No, you did it," he repeated. The Armada! Elizabeth of Armada fame!!! We never explained to Broughton. He may have looked it up, though, afterwards, in the "Encyclopædia Britannica".

If Benson's company was like a great school, Tree's company was like a college. There was a pride about being a member of it. From the highest to the lowest, everyone felt honoured at being thought worthy of having been cast for a part. He was a great fellow, Tree, and personally I never found anyone who had a grudge against him. But after playing a part for a time he longed to get at something fresh. Shortly after *Richard II* he produced *The Darling of the Gods*. He formed a company and sent it out on tour playing *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Cæsar* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In this company were William Haviland, Lionel Brough, Courtice Pounds, Constance Collier, Cicely Richards, Viola Tree, Julian Lestrangle and myself. We were, I think, playing at Glasgow when Tree left the caste of *The Darling of the Gods* in London to come down to play with his daughter. I was playing Falstaff, but when he came I played Ford. In addition, he played Malvolio and Antony. The business in the provinces did not improve, whilst the business in Town slumped. But Tree loved being with us, and playing a different part every night. It was on this tour that he, for the first and last time, ever attempted golf. Viola, who was both a keen and promising player, and myself, were going out one morning to Carnoustie. Tree came along with us. Viola had a match on with some friend and I had also fixed up. So Tree got the professional, either Archer or Robert Simpson—one of them was at Aberdeen—to teach him how to swing. The last I saw of him was swinging a driver with bowler hat and Newmarket coat on. When we next saw him, he had shed coat and hat and was still swinging. The game over, I had to get back to Dundee, and Tree came in the same carriage. "Nice man that Simpson," he said, "nice man! I did not know what to do, though, about giving him anything. Would he have accepted a sovereign?" "Of course," I said. "Well, I didn't know, so I asked him to put up in a bag a few clubs such as he thought I might require, and send in his bill to the theatre." And Tree lifted down the heavy leather bag from the rack, stuffed full with every conceivable club. Tree was very humorous. He handled each club, telling me its peculiar uses, and chuckling over it all the time. Of course, clubs were cheaper then than now, but still—I think he gave the whole lot to Viola. Viola was a great sport and ever ready for a bit of fun. I dared her one night to walk on the stage during the drinking scene, in Olivia's kitchen, between Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste. On she strode humming a tune. Brough stopped, all stopped and wondered if she had gone mad. Then she wandered off, still humming. The audience must have been puzzled.

There are so many tales of Tree, and so many have been told, that it is rather difficult to think of one that is not a chestnut. Here

is one, perhaps, and I do not know whether it is true, but certainly typical. The company was rehearsing Hall Caine's *Eternal City*. The author was present. Robert Taber (long since dead) and Constance Collier were playing the leading parts, and there was a scene in which Taber had to be very rough with the heroine. They rehearsed this particular bit several times, but to the satisfaction of neither Hall Caine nor Tree. A halt was called, and the author took the stage and delivered himself thus :

"I once witnessed a similar scene to this. It was brutal, but it thrilled me. The actor took the actress by the throat, hurled her down on a sofa and crushed the life out of her. But *this*, I may mention, was *Italy*." He resumed his seat at the prompt table in silence. Then Tree took the stage, and thus he delivered himself : "I once witnessed a similar scene to this. It was brutal, but it thrilled me. The actor took the actress by her heels, and he waved her round his head, and dashed her brains out on the stage. But this, I may mention, was—*Judy !*" The orchestra and members of the company then took ten minutes.

The mention of Italy reminds me of the Sicilian players. Grasso gave a very fierce performance of a common Othello. But there was no dignity, no touch of the noble Moor. Tree was asked his opinion, and he replied : "There would have been no tragedy. Grasso's Othello would never have asked for a handkerchief." To an actor once whom he had sent for to offer a part, and who had demanded what Tree thought was far too high a salary, he said : "You'll close the door after you, won't you ?"

Tree was an extraordinarily quick maker-up. I have often heard it said that Tree used to be made up. There is no truth in this. I have watched him making up for different parts dozens of times. I have been playing Taffy in *Trilby* in the first scene, and Tree has come on to the stage from the stage-door in his ordinary clothes and own face, and stood in the wings watching us, only a few minutes before he had to make his appearance as Svengali. We on the stage used to get quite nervy, thinking he'd never be on in time, but he never was a second late. The company was rehearsing one morning. It was at the time when both Tree and Bouchier had announced a production of *Macbeth*. Suddenly the members of the company were startled by a tremendous explosion outside. "What's that ?" everyone cried. "Bouchier's head has burst," said Tree quietly.

With Tree, Lil played for a time both Katuska in *Resurrection* and Yo San in *The Darling of the Gods*, having first starred in them on tour. She made a remarkable Jap. I remember arriving home very late one night, or morning, after a long rehearsal. I went into the bedroom, and there in bed, sound asleep, with a wonderful head-

dress, a Japanese girl. It was Lil. She had been making-up and dressing for practice, and waited up for my return to show me, but had got tired, and got into bed and slept. As Katuska she made a great impression. Certainly her drunken scene in prison was a great piece of acting.

Tree was a wonderful host. Many were the occasions when Lil and I would drive home after the show with Tree, and listen to his humorous sayings over the supper-table. And Mrs. Tree, always most charming to us both, matched him in witty sayings. I remember once, when I was waiting at the stage-door of Her Majesty's Theatre for rehearsal to start, and Mrs. Tree and Gerald Lawrence were also there, chatting. Round one corner of Charles Street came a four-wheeler, occupied by a very celebrated actress, and round the other corner of Charles Street came a brougham with an equally celebrated actress inside. "Here come the stars!" said Gerald. "You mean the ancient lights," said Mrs. Tree.

It was during my engagement with Tree that I visited America. Charles Frohman wanted me to go over and play my original part of Maldonado in *Iris*. Tree left it to me, and I went. Here and how I want to make this statement about Tree's generosity. When he released me to play Maldonado at the Garrick, he did not let me out at a profit. He let me make my own terms and keep any increase. This is absolutely opposed to the custom of the theatre-manager of to-day, not the actor-manager. An artist is so much merchandise for Shylock to deal in. I accepted Charles Frohman's offer. I had no written contract with him, just a verbal agreement, and he kept to every word of that agreement. He was as honest as a Chinaman. Higher praise is impossible. I have heard from everyone who had dealings with him that his word was always his bond. When he went down with the *Lusitania*, America lost something unique, something she has never been able to replace.

I crossed to America together with Dot Boucicault, who was going to produce the play, and Herbert Ross, an old Bensonian, who was to play Boucicault's original part. When we arrived in New York it was August and very hot. I hated the place at once; the rush and the hustle, and other things. Eventually I got settled, after many attempts, in quite a comfortable little hotel, not far from the Criterion, where we rehearsed. I am writing of New York over twenty-five years ago, and, as they pulled down a building one day and had built another in its place, of forty or fifty stories, within a week, only for that in turn to be pulled down within a month's time for something else, I dare say it's a very different place to what it was then. I hope it is also a better place. We were offered the hospitality of many clubs there, of which I entertain most pleasant

remembrances of the Lotus. The Lambs, of course, is, in its way, the most extraordinary club in the world. You meet everyone of note in the theatrical world, from the biggest star to the small-part player. No snobbery there. And if a member strikes a bad time, the hat is passed round silently and it is filled to the brim—and anonymously. I had quite a good time at The Lambs, making many friends. But it is a terribly hard place to get away home from—early.

The actress caste for Iris was, though I believe a star, not at all suitable for the part. Iris is, in the first place, a lady, and well-gowned. Julian Lestrangle had been brought over to play the juvenile, but for some reason or other he did not, and an American juvenile took the part. He was an American juvenile and therefore obviously out of place as a young Englishman educated in a public school. It must be a great hardship, I have always thought, for an American actor to play in an English play where he is not allowed to spit. They say it is the climate, but I have not known English residents there catch the complaint. Some exponents have brought it to a fine art. The cuspidor, or spittoon, is everywhere, even in church pews, I was told. I could never fathom why it was so universal. The women don't spit. Is it the cigar-chewing habit, the dry smoke, or speaking so much through the nose? Who knows?

We opened out of New York at a place called Cleveland, Ohio. That's all I know about it. We came back to New York, and opened at the Criterion. I made a success, both with the Press and the public. The star was a distinct flop, and the papers made no bones about stating so. After the notices were out, a call appeared on the board calling a rehearsal the following morning for cuts. I had heard more than whisper that my part was going to be severely mauled about. As Charles Frohman's name did not appear in any way on the call, which was headed by the star actress's name, whom let us call Miss Hardy Maiden, though not a bit like that, I did not attend. When I arrived in the evening I was asked by the stage-manager why I did not. I told him I only took notice of Mr. Boucicault, who, I think, returned to England immediately after production, or Mr. Charles Frohman. I was under engagement to him alone. I was then told of certain drastic cuts in my part. As I had played Maldonado in London for 120 nights, I knew that Mr. Pinero would not have allowed any alteration to be made. And I said so. I was then told those were Miss H. M.'s *orders*. I told him to tell the dear lady, as politely as possible, she could wear her orders where she chose, as I was not taking any from her. I was playing my part as on the night before. It was quite an amusing evening. She would come to a cut, and jump over a speech of mine, giving me a cue for the next speech. In each case I would say, "You did not allow

me to say"—or—"I was going to say"—or—"You interrupted me as I was about to say"—and then I would speak the lines she had cut out. It only lasted for one act. Then she had to go back to the original text. I called on Frohman the next day and explained, asking to be released from my contract. But he would not hear of that, and assured me it would never occur again. And it didn't. But I was not happy. Besides being bad in the part, she was so anti-British. Apropos of this, she invited me to dinner the night before we produced in New York. There was a collection of strange men there, all stinking of money. I sat on her left, and there were, I suppose, ten or twelve in all at table. From the start of the meal she displayed her anti-Britishness, but I took no notice. I thought she just wanted to draw me into an argument, and I might be rude. However, after she had got well going, the wine passing round freely, she suddenly shot out this statement. "You know, Mr. Asche, you have no great men in England." I could not let that go unchallenged. So I named a few, adding it all depended on the definition of greatness. Anyhow, I gave her a pretty comprehensive list. Men of letters, of art, of science, of politics, and so on. "Oh, that is not what *we* understand by greatness here," she replied. "By great men we mean men who by their own unaided efforts have risen from poverty to great wealth. For instance," she went on, looking at the undesirable alien on her right, "here is Mr. Rumble-Sityer," (or some such hyphenated name). "He began life as a bootblack. He is now the Preserved Fruit King of America, and has an income of twenty million dollars a year." He half-bowed, half-bobbed, in acquiescence. "Next to him is the great Rubber Prince, Mr. ——" (some other useful-sounding name). "He was a bell-boy in Chicago. Now he draws thirty million dollars a year. Then Mr. —— the Railroad Emperor. Started life as a porter, now owns six-hundred-thousand miles of permanent way." She named some others, both absent and present, all with peculiar names, all starting life after they had finished with the milk-bottle, as something very low in the social scale, and all now drawing colossal incomes. "*Those* are what *we* call great men," she concluded triumphantly. "Now, you have no men like that in England," she challenged.

"Oh, yes," I took her up. "We have—several!"

"Well, how is it we never hear of them?" she asked.

"Because we keep ours in gaol," I answered.

Now, I did not mean anyone to hear this but her. But she had raised her voice above the noise caused by the great men eating, that all stopped in their feeding, and in the great clash of silence my reply, though pitched scarcely above a whisper, was quite audible. My confusion, however, was covered by the splashing, gaspings and throat-noises that ensued as they continued where they had left off.

I inserted this into a play I produced of William Devereux's called *Big Business*.

No, I have no pleasant recollections of New York, which I understand is not America at all, and that all Americans hate it too. I have met some charming Americans over here, but none of them came from New York. I suppose New York is made up of such a mongrel lot of nationalities that the true Americans are crowded out. One certainly heard every language spoken there, and most of them unrecognizable, except Irish, which is spoken by all policemen. I don't know whether it is the law that all policemen must learn, and speak, English with an Irish brogue, just as French is the diplomatic language, or whether the Irishman, having such a respect for law and order in his own country, naturally adopts this calling when he has entered this great land of liberty. Whatever it be, the policeman is always, to ocular and aural senses, an Irishman, but, unlike the Irishman at home, who is always more or less hard up, he is here rich and all-powerful. The police make the laws of the country, and they alter them, obey them, and disobey them as and when they choose. This was all explained to me by a good American, but I got rather confused about it all. He spoke about Tammany Hall and Boss Croker, who was an Irishman and owned a Derby winner called Orby. But it was all so complicated. There was a man over there, a humorist, who made no less than thirteen police captains retire during the three months I was in New York. The fortune of each of these captains was published in the papers, together with the amount he had been paid for his services by the Government. I think the smallest fortune of the unlucky thirteen was a quarter of a million dollars—£50,000—and he certainly could not have saved it out of the wages he had been paid. Of course, at the time, twenty-five or -seven years ago, it was a difficult thing for anyone coming from England to grasp, but nowadays, having adopted so many of American institutions and methods, their negro music and dances, their newspapers and their drama, we have been experimenting in their police methods, fortunately for the community at a cost to the experimenters of both money and time, in His Majesty's Prisons.

There was a funny instance which I witnessed of American police methods. On my way from my hotel to the theatre, I passed a gaming house, or gambling-den, whatever they call them. The police had given the proprietor or occupiers notice that they were going to raid them on such-and-such a night, in about two weeks' time. So the parties interested were openly putting up iron bars to the windows and iron shutters on the doors, making the place, as it were, burglar-proof. Sure enough, on the night mentioned, the police duly raided the house, or rather, set out to do so, but were

prevented from entering on account of the well-prepared defences. But they had attempted the raid. And they reported their non-success in due course. And business continued as before. I must say this, that all the time I was in New York I never saw a case of drunkenness in the streets. One could get drunk any hour of the twenty-four. But under Prohibition!—Another case of forbidden fruit.

I was only about three months or so in New York. I did not want to go on tour. I knew it would mean an endless squabble. So I cabled Tree to cable me that he wanted me back, and like the sport he was, he did so. I showed the cable to Frohman. He smiled. He knew, all right. He shook hands and said: "You're quite right, Asche." And that was the last I saw of that great little gentleman. I think the wanton slaying of Frohman had a lot to do with America joining in the War.

I met some good fellows over there: John Drew, Loo Baker, De Wolf Hopper, William Crane, Jack and Lionel Barrymore, who were then only boys, and David Warfield, the greatest character-actor I have ever seen in any country. I only saw him in one play, *The Auctioneer*, but I went to every matinée I could, at least half-a-dozen times. And each time he made me laugh and cry. I saw no great acting in New York other than comedy and character work. But the majority of their leading ladies, especially Ethel Barrymore, were good. Their juveniles in English parts were terrible. I went the last night I was in New York to see Richard Mansfield, an Englishman, in *Julius Cæsar* at the Herald Square Theatre. A shocking production and a shocking performance by all. I went with an old white-haired solicitor from The Lambs Club. I forget his name. He assured me it was a good show. When the curtain went up, there was certainly a goodly number of supers on the stage, representing the Roman rabble, in their tunics and fleshings to represent bare legs. Now these fleshings had been put on badly, and were wrinkled, and in many places had been darned. I called my friend's attention to this, saying: "Look at their legs all wrinkled and darned." "Why, damn it, Oscar," he replied: "they are all *poor* men!" It had been well paraphrased in the Press that as Brutus, Mansfield would die in a novel manner. He did! Instead of falling on the ground after killing himself, he sat on a trunk of a tree and leant back against a tree and died with his eyes open, which was quite right. But unfortunate. For Mansfield had a squint.

Now there was at that time an ape called Consul that was being exhibited in dime museums. This educated ape in one of its acts used to don a fireman's helmet which was always a bit to one side.

Mansfield, as I say, died with his eyes open and his helmet on,

which, as he leant back, slipped to one side. There was dead silence during this paragraphed death. And my friend nudged me and I said : "Consul."

And the likeness was remarkable and recognized by those around who had heard my whisper.

A very naughty performance, this *Julius Cæsar* !

So I said good-bye to New York. I received a very tempting offer to return and play Macbeth to Mrs. Harrison Grey Fiske's Lady Macbeth, and I have received many tempting offers since, but I have never made a second visit, and I never shall.

A little while ago, whilst turning out some old trunks, I came across the following doggerel about New York. The author is anonymous ; but I remember taking a copy.

With your Avenues, your Broadway,
And your Hundred-and-something Street,
Where there's only one Delmonico's
Where a gentleman can eat ;
With your under flavoured oyster
And your overflavoured clam,
Your beastly stringy mutton
And your bloody tasteless ham—
There's nothing in your whole concern
That's worth a tinker's damn.

With your insolent conductor
In your overcrowded car,
Your smelly nigger waiter
In your spittoon-reeking bar :
With your daily Hearstpool paper,
And your smutty magazine,
Your tough who chews tobacco
And your slut who chews pepsin,
You've the foulest lot of foreign filth
That I have ever seen.

With your brothel-kept policeman,
Your police-kept gambling-den,
Your Trust-kept politician
And your gaol-kept public men ;
With your undulating pavements
And your badly-lighted streets,
Your offal-tins on doorsteps
And your faked athletic feats,
You have a fine collection
Of liars, thieves and cheats.

CHAPTER NINE

The Adelphi. Touring. His Majesty's

THE time came at last when we left Tree, with whom we had enjoyed some pleasant years. An old Bensonian, Otho Stuart, made Lil and myself a very good offer to join him in management at the Adelphi. He was finding the capital, and Lil and I were to star, and I was to produce. Naturally we accepted this offer, but before starting work we spent a holiday in Brittany.

A policy had been decided upon. We were to produce Shakespeare's plays and any new poetical plays we considered worthy. Stuart did not enter into this scheme with the sole idea of making money. Before leaving on our holiday most of the company had been engaged, and some of them remained with us during our three years' season at the Adelphi. They were recruited from the ranks of old Bensonians. The scenery had been designed and the costumes were being made before we left.

Otho Stuart had taken the Adelphi on a three years' lease. I had never been in the Strand since the episode of Harris's sausage-shop. We started with a production of *The Prayer of the Sword*, a poetical play of Italy in the Middle Ages. We all thought very highly of it, and it was by our fellow-Bensonian, James B. Fagan. I think we tried to get Henry Ainley for the leading part, but we could not. So another young Bensonian was engaged, Walter Hampden. He had a fine voice but rather stiff and uninspired. But he gave a good performance. Lil was the heroine, I, as usual, the villain. The scenery was by Joseph Harker, the costumes designed by Percy Anderson, and carried out by B. J. Simmons. And ever since then, over twenty years ago, unless I had not a free hand, these three artistes were always associated with my productions.

The play, a magnificent production, did not catch the public fancy. Then we produced *The Taming of the Shrew*. I played Sly and Petruchio, and Lil, Kate. Most of the company were old Bensonians, with the exception of Charles Rock, who was the Grumio. We played it as a jolly farce and it always went with a scream. My wife and I have played it something like fifteen hundred times, in many parts of the world. The papers, with one single exception, were most exuberant in their praises. The one exception was the

Daily Telegraph, the notice written by the late W. L. Courtney. He started off his critique thus: "It was a strange performance we saw last night. Thoroughly un-Shakespearian, it made us sorrowful!" Stuart was up in arms at once. He took the back page of the *Daily Mail* and drew out an advertisement giving the opinions of all the London papers, "including the mournful notice of the *Daily Telegraph*." Those were his words. Then, surrounded by all the eulogistic notices, he starred in the centre: "The *Daily Telegraph* says: 'It made us sorrowful'." This was enclosed by a mourning border. There was, however, trouble with the *Daily Mail*. After some hesitation the *Mail* would not insert the advertisement unless the word "sorrowful" was deleted before "notice" and the mourning border scrapped. Otho would not agree, but it was too late. The advertisement in the early editions for suburb and country appeared as originally intended. The London edition was bowdlerized. I don't know exactly what happened then. Whether Otho held them for breach of contract, and whether the cheque was returned I am not in a position to state. But I do know the *Mail remembered* us afterwards. I answered W. L. Courtney's criticism at length, having only to quote the text to disprove his fault-finding.

After *The Shrew*, in which both Lil and I made our names together, *Hamlet*. H. B. Irving was engaged for the title-rôle, Mrs. Tree for the Queen. Lil played Ophelia and I King Claudius, Lyall Swete Polonius, Alfred Brydone the Ghost. *Hamlet* got good notices and started off as a big money-maker, but unfortunately Harry Irving, through faulty voice-production, soon developed throat trouble. He kept being patched up, but ultimately had to rest, and Walter Hampden took his place. Though very good, he was not Irving, and the attendance fell off. In the meantime Lil had persuaded Harry to consult a Mr. Mathias Alexander, who had done her good. He had a system of breathing which cured and prevented throat-trouble. To Harry came Alexander, and in a little over a week had him fit again, and I do not think he was ever after troubled with "throat". H. B. was back in the bill, but too late. Then we put on *Measure for Measure*, with Lil as the nun Isabella, and I in the thankless part of Angelo. An artistic but not financial success.

We then went on tour with *The Shrew*, playing to large and enthusiastic audiences everywhere. Stuart meantime produced a modern play, *Dr. Wake's Patient*. We came back to the Adelphi for a Christmas production of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Lil as Helena, I as Bottom. This was a very fine and complete production. It ran some time and was revived the following Christmas. Fagan's *Under What King?* Comyns-Carr's *Tristram and Iseult*, with Matheson Lang as Tristram and Lil as Iseult, and I as King Mark. A very fine production. It was about this time, a summer vocation,

that Matheson Lang and his wife, Hutin Britton, Lil and myself Agnes Brayton and C. W. Mercer, better known as Dornford Yates went holidaying through the New Forest in a caravan. Accompanied by our cook, an Airedale terrier, a bulldog and a dachshund, we started off near Aldershot. The outdoor life again appealed to me. The gipsy fire and stew at night, never knowing where we were going to land up, and not caring, the bathing in pools, the poaching of rabbits for the pot, was certainly a great change from stage work. I do not understand how Lang kept his figure, for he had then a most voracious appetite, especially at breakfast.

This caravan trip was often most amusing. We joined the caravan at a place near Aldershot. The driver, Walker, had pitched in a little field opposite a little pub called "The Three Pigeons". It was far from being a sylvan spot, so we determined to shift elsewhere. So we explored, and just round a corner, up a small lane, we found a gateway leading into the most beautiful woods, with a stream close by. "The ideal spot!" I exclaimed, thinking of my old Australian days. So the horses were put in, or, rather, it was only one horse then, and Walker started. "Crash!" we heard. All the crockery inside had fallen and smashed. Round the corner and up the hill, and then we stuck. The caravan was too heavy. So we blocked the wheels and waited until we could get extra horses. The occupiers of the little cottages opposite were all very interested, especially one dear old fellow who asked us where we intended going, and so on. Eventually we borrowed a team of four horses from a brewer's lorry. These were put to it, and took the old caravan up the hill with a rush and swung through the gateway in fine style, taking with it one of the gate-posts and breaking the back axle. That was a good start. It would take a couple of days to get that replaced. Anyhow, we had a good spot to camp in. I soon had a fire alight and a kettle on for tea. Then appeared the dear old fellow from the cottages opposite with the inquisitive mind. He was dressed now in his Sunday best. He came to inform us we were trespassing on Crown grounds and must leave at once. I told him he knew very well where we were going, when we were stuck on the hill. "That I admit," was his reply, "*but I wanted to see you commit the offence.*" I pointed out the broken axle, and told him we would remain where we were unless he could get us out of the difficulty. So we remained for the night and the following day, as well, until the axle was replaced. Another horse also arrived.

After leaving here we met with a chapter of mishaps. First, the axle got overheated and started a small fire, then the horses got some skin-disease and had to be replaced. But it was all good fun. We had brought our cook with us, and it was jolly at night-time gathering round the fire for dinner, which generally consisted of a



AS CLAUDIUS IN "HAMLET"

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stew. Lang and I used to go out poaching. We had a Winchester repeating sporting rifle and neither of us were bad shots, and we several times were able to fill the pot with rabbit. It was out of season, otherwise we should have, and could have, added pheasant to the menu. We were outlaws and defied authority. We got to one spot where we stayed several days, and Lang, or, as we always called him, Tristram, damned up a stream with earth and stone and made a lovely bathing-pool where we spent a great part of the day. Then we went trout-fishing, but had little success. We three men slept in a tent and the female crew in the caravan. Now Lang and Mercer objected strongly to mosquitoes. I was impervious to them. But Lang used to make that tent stink so with citronella and oil of lavender that it was impossible not only for mosquitoes but also for human beings to live in. But Lang, being inhuman, could stick it, and so had the tent to himself. He was very good, even then, in a Borgia part. And, though Scotch, he had a great sense of humour. Of late years I have only run across him once, when we had a pleasant time of "Do you remembers?" I am sure he will admit that those days were freer from worry than when one has taken up the reins of management! I know I was happier on £5 a week than I was when I was drawing between £700 and £800 a week.

The one more memorable production at the Adelphi was Rudolph Bessier's *The Virgin Goddess*. It was Jimmy Fagan who gave me this to read. I read it with astonishment. I read it to Lil twice and it gripped us. I took a car the following day, Sunday, and drove out to Otho Stuart's house at Colnbrook. There I read to him and his wife the play. "Yes, we'll do that, Oscar," declared Otho, and we did. And Genevieve Ward was engaged for the old blind Queen, Lil having a good part, I also. It was a Greek tragedy, all in one set, and though it was divided into three Acts, it could have been played straight through. The unities were preserved. It took the same time to play as it would have done to live. When the curtain rose on the Second and Third Acts, the situation at the end of the preceding Act was held. Harker designed and painted a most dignified scene. White marble and blue skies. The play created a furore the first night. Never before or since have I known such a tumult of applause and so sustained. We took call after call, everybody; and the author was led on half a dozen times and acclaimed. Then we let the fire-proof curtain down, and the stalls folk came on to the stage and heaped congratulations on us. "Wait and see what the papers say," said I, the pessimist. "Never mind the papers. Nothing can kill this great show." Then Otho came round. "You must have the curtain up again," he said. "The pit and gallery will not leave." So up it went again, and on we all went for a call, over and over again. And at the end the people were discussing it in the

street. The next morning the dreaded Press proclaimed it the greatest play for a century. Our greatest British dramatist, etc., etc. The praise was too great for either play or performance. Only Keble Howard, in the *Daily Mail*, tried to ridicule it, as one can ridicule anything. We were invited out to O. P. dinners, when it was *The Virgin Goddess* first and the rest nowhere. And the result? It ran five weeks, to miserable business. Why? Because the general public are not interested in the loves and hates of a bygone age? Or was it too tragic? But it met the same wild enthusiasm in the provinces, and in Australia, and the same bad houses.

Unfortunately, shortly after we produced the play at the Adelphi Lil met with a serious accident, which kept her out of the bill for several weeks, but although this considerably weakened the general performance, I do not think it accounted for the non-success. She was driving home to St. John's Wood from the theatre, dropping me at my club on the way. I had not been there half an hour before a telephone message came through to tell me that Miss Brayton had met with a serious accident and had been taken to the Lamb Hotel. There were no taxis in those days, so I took a hansom. No one knew where the Lamb Hotel was, and I did not know where we had been run up from. So I drove home first, to find that no one there had heard any news. Then the telephone went again. It was the Langham not the Lamb. There, a good hour after the first telephone message, I found her. The shaft of a four-wheeler had crashed through the window of her brougham and cut her head open just above the eye. She would let no one do more than wash it till I came. Fortunately our old friend, Sir Alfred Fripp, was almost next door. Very soon he was on the spot, and a great job he made of a very nasty wound. But it was not until the last week of the run that she again appeared in her part. Not long afterwards the season closed.

At the Adelphi we had in our company a fat little comedian. He was an unconscious humorist, as so many Shakespearian comedians are. I think it was during the run of *The Dream* that the following story of him was told. He used to relate to the other members of the company in the same dressing-room his daily doings. He had been out this particular day, he said, looking for a good but cheap dentist. In his search, which was apparently a long one, he had found himself in Edgware Road. Here he discovered a dentist who advertised full sets of teeth from 20s. upwards, and extractions half-a-crown. That was the cheapest he had found so far, and as both he and his wife, who had accompanied him, were tired, he decided to risk it. So they were shown into the dentist's waiting-room. Business being evidently slack, they were not kept waiting long before the dentist himself appeared. "What can I do for you, sir?" he said, addressing the comedian, who hoping perhaps to get

a reduction by flattery, said he had been told that he, the dentist, was a very good dentist. "You have been very highly recommended to me," he added. "That is very nice," said the dentist, "and what can I do for you?" "Well, I told him," said our friend, "that it was a question of the extraction of a tooth. I told him that the tooth was slightly decayed, that the nerve was exposed and was causing a great deal of pain. Whereupon the dentist advised that the nerve should be destroyed and the tooth stopped. "But I told him," he went on, "that stopping simply meant re-stopping and re-stopping at certain intervals for years and years, one expense after another. "No," I definitely told him, "there is only one thing to do, and that is to pull it out." The dentist shrugged his shoulders and said: "As you please, sir," and asked which tooth it was. I told him it was one of the far back ones. "Ah!" he said. "I must tell you that one of those back teeth, if only slightly decayed, is a tough one to extract. It has several roots or fangs"—I forget what he called them, but I told him I understood. Then—and I always am on my guard against these gentlemen with their extras—then he suggested that he would advise, strongly advise that, as the tooth would cause a great deal of pain, the extraction should take place under an anæsthetic. 'You mean gas?' I asked, and he nodded. "And what would that cost extra?" "Another half-crown," he replied, without turning a hair. "Oh, no! Oh, dear no!" I told him. I was not going to the expense of paying half-a-crown for the sake of saving a little pain. "Don't let it affect you," I told him; "do not be upset by any pain it causes, any moans or cries; simply pull it out." He looked at me and said: "Do you know, sir, I think you are the pluckiest man I have ever met." "Me?" I said. "Me! Not me! *My wife*." "And do you know," he concluded, after the laughter had subsided—and he never understood why they laughed—"do you know that, although I told him I was an actor and would recommend him, he made no reduction. These professional gentlemen are certainly—grasping."

There was another story about him and his wife, who, he said, was "as pretty a piece of flesh as any in Messina". We were playing *The Shrew* in Glasgow, in November, I think. I know it was very cold weather. The comedian was playing Grumio. His wife had written him saying she would like to come to Glasgow to see him and spend a few days with him. This was the week before. So he sent her a return-ticket by steamer. The boat was delayed by bad weather and Mrs. Comedian did not turn up at his digs, very much the worse for sea wear and tear, until Sunday morning. "You're very late, my dear," he said as he finished packing his bag, "and we have an early train call. The boat starts back to-morrow, doesn't it? Well, write to me Theatre Royal, Birmingham, when you get back to London, and let me know all about how you have enjoyed

the trip. Now I must be off. Have my breakfast—I've scarcely touched it—and remember it's included in the bill, and I've paid it. Good-bye."

All these tales he would tell his room-mates at the theatre at great length. They always listened attentively, for they often found a pearl.

It was also at the Adelphi that a good story against myself is recorded. There was one of those competitions running in some weekly paper as to what was the ideal caste for *As You Like It*. The one who got the most votes for any particular character got a prize. Lil won the prize for Rosalind and she got quite a nice evening-gown. I won the prize for Charles the Wrestler. The prize for this was an overcoat to be made to order. In due course a little man of Jewish persuasion was ushered into my dressing-room. It was the tailor. "You are Oscar Asche?" he asked. I admitted it. "Yes," said he, looking at his notebook. "An overcoat. I made a contract," he went on, "with this paper to supply an overcoat to order to the prize-winner of the part of Charles for a certain sum. But I never thought"—and he shrugged his shoulders—"However, it is a contract." Then he proceeded to take my measurements. He was a little man. "You want an overcoat, yes?" he asked. "I think so." He was reaching round my back under my coat to take my chest measurement. He drew the tape-measure together and looked at it. "It's not caught up anywere vas it?" he muttered, and put a hand round to feel. "No!" sadly—and he wrote the figure down. "Forty-six!" Then the waist measurement—a great deal less these days—about 38, and then round the hips. Then he looked at me sadly. "You von't vant the coat *long*, vill you?" However, I soon comforted him by telling him I didn't want it at all. He sent me the following day a box of twenty-five quite nice cigars.

All our Shakespearian productions at the Adelphi were successful both artistically and financially, except *Measure for Measure*, which we put on because it had not been done for so many years. It was well received by the Press, but it did not appeal to the public. *The Taming of the Shrew* was an easy first. It was so full of life, and we contrived to have all the parts played as human beings, not as penny-in-the-slot spouting machines. It is this same elocuting which is the cause of Shakespeare being unpopular with the great majority of theatre-goers. That and the compulsory cramming of the Bard down the throats of school-children. I used to be ordered to write out some long speech from Shakespeare a dozen times or so as a punishment. No wonder that many who as children were introduced to him in this manner loathe the sound of his name when they grow up. And if by any chance they pay a visit to a provincial theatre and witness a Shakespeare play mouthed and postured by some

companies I know of, they fight shy of him in future. In our *Taming of the Shrew* the characters walked, ate and drank like living people. And they ate real food and drank real wine, not property-made cakes and fruit and coloured water. And the extra cost was well repaid by the obvious relish with which they partook of their victuals. And how many times have you seen, even in modern times, a character, after declaring he wanted a whisky-and-soda or a glass of wine, merely touch the nauseating fluid provided by the stage-manager and get rid of the glass as soon as possible. And in costume plays one sees golden goblets, supposedly full of good wine, being so waved about and so jerked up into the air when drinking the health of someone or other, that all the liquor must have been spilt long before the actor pretended to drink it. And the audience can see they are not really drinking because their throats are not swallowing. It is not easy to eat and act at the same time, and one has to rehearse it time after time, or one is apt to get a coughing attack. A bit has gone the wrong way. Ibsen, a master stage-manager, was most particular about this, as he was over all details. I remember a brilliant performance of Nora in *A Doll's House* by a Scandinavian actress, munching her forbidden macaroons whilst she played one of her long scenes. I found out how difficult this was when at His Majesty's Theatre, as Jaques in *As You Like It*, I devoured a large apple during my speaking of the Seven Ages speech.

The last scene of our *Shrew* production was laid in a room of an Italian inn, being Lucentio's lodging, and not, as is often the case, in marble halls or gilded palaces. In this room were two old wooden tables laid out for about twenty guests; the servants clearing away the last course and everyone partaking of fruit and wine. And after Kate's advice to wives, the whole thing ended in a jolly dance. Whatever pedants may have said, we played *The Shrew* in London and the provinces, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, some 1,500 times, without once failing to please the audience.

After the Adelphi season closed, we went on tour with *The Shrew*. We produced *Othello*, my favourite part, at the Kennington Theatre, and it has always proved a strong card ever since. Not once has *Othello* had a losing night. This time it was most successful, and we broke many records for a Shakespeare play. Naturally we longed to be once again in management of a London theatre, and this time on our own. I wanted especially for Miss Brayton to play Rosalind in *As You Like It*. She had, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, challenged comparison with Ada Rehan, and, according to the Press, who are generally in favour of anything foreign, she had come out quite satisfactorily. At last the opening occurred. Two gentlemen were greatly interested in a play, *Attila*, by Laurence Binyon, a cousin, I believe, of Stephen Phillips. And we were

approached if we would produce it with their backing. I read the tragedy, a most beautiful work, but after my experience with *The Virgin Goddess* I could not see a financial success. I agreed to do it if we could follow with *As You Like It*. It was in fateful Newcastle that our solicitor came down from London with all the contracts ready for our signature. An agreement had been signed for us to take His Majesty's Theatre for a season, where we produced *Attila*, with scenery and costumes designed by Charles Ricketts. It was at that time an unique production, but before its time. Again the remoteness of the period was against financial success. Everything was ready for the production of *As You Like It*. For this Harker designed and painted the scenery, and Percy Anderson the costumes, Simmons, as usual, carrying them out. In the setting of the Forest of Arden scene I entered into a contract with a Covent Garden firm of florists. We used two thousand pots of ferns, besides large clumps of bamboos. The floor of the forest was covered over with cartloads of last autumn's leaves and moss grew on the fallen logs. It was admitted that there had never been a more natural forest scene on the stage before, and I know there has not been since. The characters in one of the big forest sets walked through ferns in places two feet high. Many were trodden down in the course of a week, calling for a fresh supply of about 600. In the daytime they were kept on the roof. Another large set was of Rosalind's straw-thatched cottage in a little garden at the edge of a pine wood. And for the first time in the history of the stage Rosalind as Ganymede was dressed as a shepherd boy, with smock and crook. Henry Ainley was Orlando, Lily Brayton Rosalind, Godfrey Tearle Sylvius, Courtice Pounds Touchstone, Alfred Brydone Old Adam, Caleb Porter Corin, Marianne Caldwell Audrey, myself Jacques, Kay Souper Usurping Duke, Muriel Ashwynne Celia, Reginald Ian Penny Oliver, and H. R. Hignett the Banished Duke. Lily Brayton and Henry Ainley were ideal forest lovers, as I had anticipated. That was a caste, a good caste. And yet, though we paid £375 a week for bare rental, which left a profit rental to Tree of £210 a week, the highest rent that had ever been paid for a theatre to that date, our weekly expenses were only £1,250. Now £700 is asked for the rent of the same theatre, although it is now old-fashioned and has lost its *cachet* owing to the succession of failures produced there after *Cairo* finished in 1922. *As You Like It* was both a financial and artistic success.

During our season there we also produced *Othello* and revived *The Shrew* for extra matinées only. During the run of *As You Like It* we indulged in a bit of Bensonian leg-pulling at the expense of the aforesaid comedian, who for this purpose shall be called X—He was playing the small part of Oliver Martext. How or why it

started I do not know—I suppose I was responsible for it. It was towards the end of the matinée, I was speaking to Caleb Porter, and the name of X— cropped up. "Let's knight him, Caleb," I said. I have no idea what I meant. "Right," said Caleb; "we will." Now Caleb was, and I am sure is still, very clever with his brushes. With Indian ink he has made copies of the front page of *Punch* which you could scarcely distinguish from the original. In a few minutes he had brought me an evening paper, and in the Stop Press space appeared this item of news, painted in by Porter, blur and all, like the real goods. It ran: "A New Order. His Majesty has created a new order, a Knight probationship for minor actors." I saw what was to come, and he went on with it. Later news appeared in the Stop Press. "The first recipient of the new honour was X—, now acting in *As You Like It*."

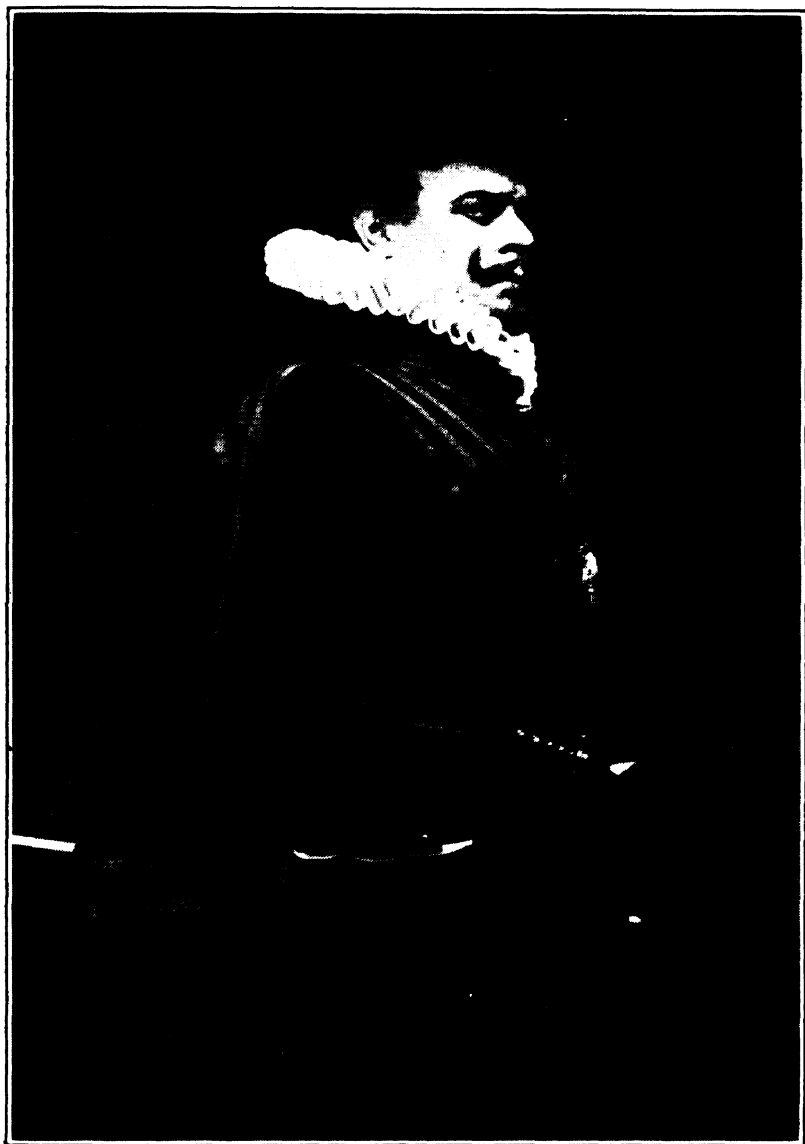
By the time the evening show was being called, Caleb had planted several paper-boys outside the stage door, with papers containing the Stop Press information, all different papers, and the boys had their instructions. As soon as X— arrived at the stage door, the commissionaire saluted him and said: "Congratulations, sir. The governor wants to see you." A knock at the door and X— appeared. I stood up, held out my hand and said: "Congratulations." He did not know what I meant. He stuttered something. "Have you not seen the evening paper?" I asked. No, he had not. So I handed it to him. "In the Stop Press," I said. He put on his glasses and read. He handed back the paper, gave a silly laugh, and said: "Excuse me," and rushed from the room. The paper-boys did their duty and X— returned, went up to his room and read them over and over again. Congratulations were overwhelming. He muttered something: "Well, it's been a long time coming, but it's come at last." When he made his appearance the attendants in front, well primed, gave him an ovation. He went down to the footlights and bowed. He was sent for to my room. He was wanted on the phone. "Sir, who speaking?" said he. "Oh, yes, Sir ——"—naming a high official. "Yes, sir, I understand. Buckingham Palace, ten sharp. Full court dress." Court dress was a staggerer. "I'll send my man round to Clarkson's," I said, and I did. The voice at the other end of the phone had been Henry Dana's, who was in the pull. Then there was a knock on the door. "Come in," I called. And there entered a handsome, white-haired, white-moustached old gentleman in full evening dress (the head usher). Across his shirt-front was a broad red sash and round his collar hung the ribbon of some order. He read as best he could from an official-looking document. Behind him stood the two powdered footmen of the theatre. The document was in French. X— could not understand a word, but was duly impressed. The old gentleman then held out his hand, which X— grasped. "No,"

I whispered. "Kiss it and drop on one knee." Which he did. "Now you kiss him on both cheeks, French fashion." And he did, and all three backed out of the room. By this time news came that a full court-dress was in Mr. X—'s room. And he went up to try it on. They had done him well up in his room. All stood drinks, and he stood drinks, and it was mostly drink that stood before me at the end of the performance, in court dress, ill-fitting and with a sabre for a court sword. They had been teaching him French salutations upstairs; and these he now rehearsed to me. I don't know how it ended. The boys, I think, took him home. But he did not go to the Palace in the morning, and it was a very subdued X— who arrived for the show the next night, full of wonderment.

The first time Tree saw our production of *As You Like It*, he was surprised at the celerity with which the scenes were changed. I explained to him that it was due to the fact that all the scenes were designed by one scenic artiste only, Joseph Harker. It had been Tree's custom in heavy shows to divide the scenery up amongst several artists. The result of this was that each artist wanted the entire stage for his scene. He did not know, and cared less about, the requirements or designs of his fellow-artistes. When the scenes were delivered and set up, it would be discovered that it was impossible to change from one artiste's scene to another's under twenty minutes. So chunks had to be cut out of perhaps both scenes, causing not only heart-burnings but loss of money and loss of effect. After this, Tree followed the same rule and saved himself both money and worry.

Shortly after Christmas we had to give back the theatre to Tree for his production of *Edwin Drood*. We went on tour with *As You, Shrew*, and *Othello*. At Bristol during this tour we produced a dramatization by myself of Stanley Weyman's *Count Hannibal*. This proved a great success on tour. Stanley Weyman and his wife attended the first night and were highly delighted with both adaptation and production. He was a gentle, kindly man, not at all like one's conception of the author of such stirring books as *Under the Red Robe*, *Count Hannibal*, *The Castle Inn*, *Gentleman of France*, etc., etc.

We had already entered into a contract with Meynell Clark and Simm to pay a visit to Australia with a full company, together with scenery and properties and costumes. Strangely enough, this contract was signed and sealed at Newcastle-on-Tyne. Lil at once set about having new costumes made for several plays. We were thus prepared to present in Australia the following plays: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Cæsar*, *The Virgin Goddess*, *Count*



[Photograph by Histed

AS "COUNT HANNIBAL"

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CHAPTER TEN

The First Voyage to Australia

WE sailed on the *Orontes* some time in April, 1909, with a full company, scenery, properties, and costumes for *The Shrew*, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Count Hannibal*, *The Virgin Goddess*. Lil had never been on a voyage before. She was not a good sailor. When she got on the tender to take us to the *Orontes* in mid-stream, she turned to me and said: "But this is a very *small* boat." She thought we were already on the liner.

It was very interesting to see the change in Cairo after about twenty years, and of course all the company, who had never been there before, thought it wonderful. And so that voyage is, through the searchlight-lit canal at night; and then the first acquaintance with Colombo. A red-letter day in one's life. The blue sky above all as one stepped ashore, the chatter and the jolly rickshaws, and the ride along the red roads, and past the green palms, with every conceivable colour scintillating in the sun. Hindoos, Pathans, funny little bullocks drawing great carts. And then the Galle-Face Hotel, and the sellers of lace and precious stones. And old—I forget his name—who has a shop in the hotel ready to make you silk suits before you leave. The man with the mongoose and cobra, though they never are allowed to fight. The man with his "Charlie, Charlie," doing the mango trick, the woman being sliced to pieces inside the basket, and then jumping out hale and hearty. I have been there many times, but one never tires of it. We bought lots of junk, and then we had lunch, a change after the liner's food, good though that was. After lunch, coffee, and more conjurors, more merchants, but never the celebrated rope trick! Is it a myth, or is the audience hypnotized? Anyhow, I have never met anyone who has actually seen it. We rickshaw it out to Mount Lavinia. There I am reminded in a way of the Fiji Islands as the catamarans sail in to the beach. Boys climb trees for coco-nuts, if you will pay. It is all *pay*. You are offered something—a shell, cigarette-case, or lace, or what-not. "How much?" you ask. "200 rupees." "How much is that?" you wonder, and everybody begins to calculate, and then the greenhorn exclaims. "Oh, but isn't it cheap!" And the wily merchant hears it, and it is then hard to beat him

down. But the old hand will promptly offer him 30 rupees. A look of sorrow comes over the innocent native face and the new hand, especially if it's a woman, exclaims. "Oh, how disgraceful ! How absurd !" Then, perhaps, after he has walked away umpteen times and come back again, you will secure the junk for 20 rupees, and not too cheap at that. There is one thing about them. To any passenger on an outward voyage they will generally say : "Pay if you like when you come back." Not to all, but they are keen observers of faces and make few mistakes. Here for the first time one tastes the mango and the mangosteen and other new fruits. Dinner at the Galle-Face or at the G.O.H. is very uninteresting and stodgy. One expects something Oriental. No ; it's tomato soup, turbot, roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, potatoes, and an ice-cream. I wonder why ? I have never known it vary much. Of course, Mount Lavinia, at lunch, is the place to taste Chu Chin Chow curries and dishes.

Very tired, but full of a new joy in life, we return home to our ship. Cocktails are called for and you all display your purchases. And in the morning it is far behind you. Ten days or more steaming, everything now beginning to be boresome, complaints that the food has got *awful*, though it is really that your palate wants change. You get tired of partridges, "always partridges" don't you ? Having travelled ten days or so farther East, you expect to see something more colourful and enchanting than Colombo. And you land at *Fremantle* ! The dirtiest, most Godforsaken shanty-built place imaginable. Everybody's face drops. Is this Australia ? No more than Tilbury is England. We leave this nasty hole and motor to Perth on the Swan River. If the flowering gum-trees are in blossom it is a wonderful sight, masses of several shades of red and pink. And on the grass beneath, the flannel flower and kangaroo-foot. There is no good hotel, or was not any time I've been there, but there was a big luncheon-party in our honour, and speeches and thousands of letters and telegrams from all parts of Australia, welcoming me home. That put a bit of buck into one, to get that welcome. Here I met an old schoolmaster, proud of my having been his pupil. We were soon off again and across the Bight, and then Adelaide. Here there was a civic reception of me and my wife, and another honour lunch at the chief hotel. And then on to Melbourne. We arrived fairly early in the morning, but even at that hour the pier was crowded. I had come home. As we were being warped in, hundreds of voices coo-ee'd and called "Oscar !" I waved and coo-ee'd in return. And then I saw mother waving, and my two sisters and younger brother, and my stepbrother. The old white-topper was not there. He had died some years ago. I should have liked to have heard his voice call "Oscar" more than all the rest.

Presently I went to my cabin and waited for mother and the

others. They came. Tears and embraces and handshakes, no one knowing what to say first. Then off we drove to Menzies Hotel, where a reception awaited me from my old school. There was no rest. Receptions, dinners, invitations, telegrams, callers whose faces one suddenly remembered. What a home-coming it was! Nothing, nothing can ever deprive me of that. I had made good and had come home to show them. Whatever the future years held, or still hold, for me, nothing can eliminate that. Nor the first night, when I appeared in *The Shrew*, and made my first appearance as Christopher Sly. For over five minutes they greeted, shouted at me. Could anyone ever forget that? And when Lil appeared as Kate the play was interrupted whilst a huge floral offering was lowered from the gallery. And up in a box sat a proud white-haired old lady, my mother. After the final curtain I do not know what happened. I thanked them, but how could one really thank them? Hundreds waited in little Bourke Street by the stage door, and we could scarcely move off in our car. At Menzies, another welcome supper awaited us. And so on for days and days. The Press was full of praise for everything—ourselves, our company and our productions. Now here is a curious thing which is general in Australia. The opening night, Saturday, had been booked out for weeks before, as soon as the date was announced of our leaving England. But for the second night, Monday, or any other night there was not ten pounds' worth of seats booked. We had to make good first. As we made good, there was a rush on Monday, and full houses ever after for *The Shrew*. After six weeks of *The Shrew*, and as we were only booked for ten weeks our first visit to Melbourne, we put up *Othello*. This beat all records of the theatre, and though I had never played the part more than three times in a week before, I played it eight times in a week for two weeks. There were several funny incidents during our run of *Othello*.

It must be remembered that *Othello* was to a vast majority of Melbourne playgoers a novelty. Many of them did not know the story. And it had not been played, at any rate in the principal theatre, for years. One night during the final scene when Othello kills Desdemona, one woman's voice rang out from the dress-circle: "You big black ——" and I waited for the next word. It must be alliterative. It was "—beast!" she concluded, and there was a sigh of relief. On another occasion a gentleman from "way back" in the stalls threatened to go for me, and rose in his seat, so I am told, to do so, but was pulled down by his companions. In Sydney, during the Third Act, a youth called out to Iago: "You're a bloody liar!"

But the Australian audience is as appreciative an audience as any in the world, and very much better behaved than the majority.

For instance, if they do not like the play, they do not create a disturbance, and hoot and hiss, and indulge in other such-like White-chapel behaviour. They just do not applaud. Neither do late-comers interfere with the progress of the play and irritate the people who have arrived in time. Nor do they chatter aloud during the performance. No, the Australian audiences police themselves. The Australian is not bound down by any traditions. If anything annoys him, he is not afraid of saying so. And he takes measures to put annoyances down. I remember in the old George Rignold *Henry V* days in Sydney, that there was a tendency on the part of some people to arrive after the curtain was up, pushing their way past those already seated to get to their seats. Complaints in the papers had no effect. Then some non-conservative Australian brain-wave occurred. It seemed almost spontaneous. This is what happened. Many of these early-comers who had suffered came provided with stout pins. The first late arrivals, as they passed by and in front of these sufferers, suffered themselves, for they got it—well, not exactly in the neck but somewhere behind them. Others arriving late got it also. Some expostulated, but they were soon howled down. It was not long before no one would dare to pass to one's seat if one arrived late. Whether this was practised elsewhere I do not know, nor do I know whether this is the reason, but certainly Australian audiences are very punctual. And unhappy he or she who chatters aloud during the course of the play. A peremptory "Shut up!" from someone near, and if not listened to, he or she is made most uncomfortable. This may be looked upon as an uncouth way of dealing with such nuisances, but no more uncouth than the behaviour that evokes it.

I was playing *Othello* at the Criterion Theatre, Sydney, in 1909, when one evening, again in the final scene, a couple of galleryites made one or two rude remarks—being a bedroom scene, that gave them their cue. This caused a disturbance round them. I walked down to the footlights and said: "When those two 'larrikins' are turned out of the theatre, the play will continue." Then I had the curtain rung down, which the audience loudly applauded. It went up again within a couple of minutes, and dead silence ensued till the play was finished. Afterwards I saw the two young interrupters. A policeman had brought them to my dressing-room to know whether I wished to prosecute them. But as they had been badly mauled by their fellow-galleryites as they had run from their seats, I considered they had received their lesson.

After our season in Melbourne we trained it to Sydney. I was sorry to leave Melbourne, where I seemed to meet again all the ghosts of the past. Faces I knew again but had not thought of or visualized for years. Old Miss Shaw came to see me. She was sure it was her

training that had brought me success. Faces of school chums, now middle-aged men, schoolmasters now falling into the sere and yellow. And at my old school, the Melbourne Grammar, I was given a reception in the big schoolroom by hundreds of present and old Melburnians, and had to make a speech, of course, and ask the head master to give the school a half-holiday. I was also invited to a dinner at the school, at which only the masters were present, and in the room where I had often been caned.

So on to Sydney, where reception followed reception. We arrived at Sydney on the Friday. We were due to open the season on the Saturday night with *The Shrew*. The house had been sold by auction. I had had to pay £20 for a box for my mother. The Governor-General, Lord Dudley, and the State-Governor, Lord Chelmsford, were both honouring us with their presence. On arrival, I went to the theatre, but was asked not to go on the stage, as it was not quite clean from the alterations they had been engaged on, increasing the size of the stage for our productions. As no rehearsals were necessary, I went to the races on Saturday, turning up at the theatre just in time to have a look round and dress. However, I was again decoyed away from the stage. I went to my dressing-room and made up for Christopher Sly. I heard "God Save the King" played twice, once for each Governor as he arrived, and then *The Taming of the Shrew* overture started. "Beginners" were called, and I strolled down on to the stage. And I stopped dead. It must be a dream, a horrible nightmare. There were two labourers loading up a last barrowful of bricks and rubbish. Not a cloth was hanging, not a stock of scenery was set, or ready to set. And the overture came to an end. Then our manager, Mr. Bertie Meyers, and our stage-manager and stage-carpenter, approached me. They had hoped against hope that all would be ready, but it was not. Here was indeed a state of affairs. It would take half an hour before we could even make a start. So poor Bertie had to go in front and apologize and explain, and for half an hour the orchestra played—every tune that had ever been composed, it seemed to me. At last we made a start. A wonderful reception again, but what a night! Unrolling of cloths and hanging them, and in the middle of the play the lights went out, and we played two entire scenes with only two candles as lights. And one paper the next day praised my artistic lighting in these scenes. But the curtain fell at last, after over four hours of nerve-racking. And after a speech of thanks and apologies, the audience left. The papers were kind indeed the next day, and gave good notices for what must have been a very bad performance.

I do not intend to write of our tour in detail. Suffice it to state that everywhere we went we met the same enthusiastic reception, and full houses. Three or four days after our opening in Sydney,

poor John Gunn, partner of Clyde Meynell and Sir Rupert Clark, died. His death was accelerated by watching, night and day for a fortnight, the alterations to the theatre, breathing in the dust-laden air into his already weak lungs.

Apart from the theatre, we had a splendid time also. Hospitality was showered upon us everywhere. And during the whole time of eighteen months we never spent one Sunday, our only free day, indoors. In Melbourne we formed motor-parties and drove into the glorious scenery of the Black Spur mountains, where the ferns, eighty feet high, with a spread of forty feet, grow together with giant gum-trees towering to hundreds of feet, and of such girth that a cutting has been made in some which will allow a coach to be driven through. Amongst these giants we would stop and lunch, cooking our food in brick fireplaces especially provided by the authorities. Many fires have at times raged through these forests, but not detracted from, but rather added to, their beauty, the tall black trunks making the white bark of the white gum-tree and the vivid green of the ferns stand out more distinctly.

In Sydney we used to leave after the show, sometimes as many as twenty-five of us, and go by motor-boat to some part of the harbour where there was a beach, and camp for the night. The women slept on board, and the men in a tent or in the open. But first supper had to be cooked. That was my job. Bacon and kidneys frizzled over a red wood fire, made of she-oak, and dozens of eggs, scrambled. The following morning everyone was in bathing costume and in the water, close in shore, you bet, on account of sharks, whose fins we could often see some dozen or so yards away. Breakfast, the inevitable bacon and eggs, then off in the motor-boat to some other pitch. Here lunch would be cooked, sometimes a sucking-pig roasted on a spit, and once when we had a large party, including the late Lewis Waller, Madge Titheradge and Mr. and Mrs. William Devereux, I had no less than twenty large chickens to split in half and grill, and without a grid-iron. Often we would remain out till Monday midday, fresh supplies having to be sent for to feed the ravenous wolves. We all got as brown as walnuts, though sometimes in the process of sun-tanning we got well blistered, or rather, those did who neglected to coat their skins well with coco-nut oil. On the beaches round about Sydney, Coger, Bondi and other well-known surfing bays, one sees thousands of men and women and children almost black-skinned. Some never get past a turkey-red, and others are spotted like leopards with freckles. Surf-bathing is a most enjoyable, but often a most dangerous pastime, owing to the sharks. At one time it was thought that these monsters would never trespass beyond the first breaker, but one Sunday morning the alarm was given, and thousands scrambled out on to the beach and watched

a couple of twelve-footers coursing, like a couple of greyhounds, a fish in not more than three feet of water. Mr. Shark had broken all the rules of the game. On each beach there is a watch-tower from which a man keeps a look out, and as soon as a shark's fin appears in dangerous proximity to the bathers, he rings a bell, and that is the signal for a race to safety. Teams of life-savers are formed. The members of these teams are all expert swimmers, perfect specimens of young manhood. In case of need, these men swim in with a line to rescue anyone who is in difficulties. They fear nothing. Without them surfing would be impossible. Whilst we were there a young girl who was standing only up to her waist in water had both legs taken off by a monster. In middle harbour, one Sunday, for the moment forgetting all about sharks, I dived from the launch and swam a hundred yards to shore in the very spot where a sailor had been pulled down a week before. I had got about half-way when I remembered, and, needless to add, I did not dawdle the remainder of the distance. And I was well slanged by those on shore and those on the launch when I did land. At Coogee and Bondi, men with rod and line fish for shark from the beach, and fish up to fifteen feet in length have been brought to shore after an hour or more playing. The shark is now being hunted for commercial uses, for his hide, his liver and his oil. It sometimes appears on the table in steak form. And shark-fins are considered a great delicacy, especially by the Chinese. Australia practically depends on the Chinese market-gardener for his green vegetables. No other can compete with them, either as regards price or quality. For one thing, he does *work*. No eight-hour day for the Chink. From dawn to sunset for seven days a week he is in his garden. And when he has saved up sufficient money, off he goes to his beloved China and lives like a mandarin the rest of his days. He is a very frugal liver when he has to pay for his own food, but if not—well, we had a Chinese gardener in the old days. He worked well and was paid a small wage and had to find his own food. Father thought it was rather hard on him, so he told him he could eat what he liked. And he did ; but mother soon put a stop to that. Talk about the Colorado beetle eating everything you've got. That Chinaman spent the whole day at it.

After our season in Sydney we returned to Melbourne about Christmas-time. We had our Christmas dinner out at Lilydale, close to Nelly Melba's house, and one of the party was her brother, Charlie Mitchell, who had married a childhood's sweetheart of mine, Blanche Blayney, at whose father's vineyard in Goulbourne Valley I had spent many happy holidays. It was boiling hot, but, like all Australians, we had the same fare as people "at home", as England is always called. Roast turkey, Christmas pudding, mincepies, and 100 degrees in the shade. The country round about Mitchell's

farm abounded in quail, and in the season some of us used to put in several days' shooting with him. He was one of the crack shots of Australia and won many a prize at pigeon-shooting. He was then a wild, red-headed scamp, full of fun and mischief, and his father, David Mitchell, kept a very tight hand over him. Old David Mitchell was very Scotch in every way, and Charlie told me a couple of good examples of his Scotchness. He had a station some good distance away from his farm at Lilydale, of which Charlie was manager. He told Charlie one day to find a couple of drovers to send to this station to drive down to the farm several hundred head of fat cattle. Being a slack time at the farm, and wanting a change, Charlie volunteered to do it himself, single-handed, with his dogs, of course. The old man accepted the offer, and Charlie set out, promising that the stock would arrive on a certain day. He carried out his side of the programme, and as he was a great favourite with all the farmers on the route, who were always glad to welcome his cheery face, he had a good time, and the cattle got free grazing all the way down. I do not remember how long this droving took, but fat cattle must not be travelled too far or too fast. Anyhow, on the day appointed, David Mitchell was on the spot with the slip-rails down leading into the paddock where the beasts were to be turned in, when the cattle arrived in a cloud of dust along the road, with red-haired Charlie riding behind with his dogs. Old Mitchell, who had a good eye for a beast, noted that not a horn or hoof was missing, and all in prime condition. Charlie dismounted after the last beast had been turned in and the slip-rails put up. "I'm very proud of you, Charlie lad," said the old man in his strong Scotch accent, "very proud of you." Charlie, very expectant, muttered something about it only being his duty, etc., etc. "Aye, but you've saved me a tidy bit of money," said the old man, and he reckoned up aloud what the two men's wages would have amounted to. "And you've landed them in prime condition. They'll fetch a good price at Flemington (the sheep and cattle market)." "Yes," put in Charlie, as a makeweight, "and I got free grazing all the way." "Did you now?" said David in real surprise. "Well, that's very good, and I intend to make you a small present, Charlie." Charlie still protested it was merely his duty. "No," said the old man, "I'm giving you a present. I bought two white shirts in Melbourne last week, and they're too small for me, but they'll fit you fine."

The other story was this. The old man paid a surprise visit to the farm one day. He was always doing this, to see if Charlie was working. But Charlie always used to know of these surprise visits, because as soon as the old man boarded the train at Melbourne, the station-master would phone to the station-master at Lilydale, who at once sent a messenger to Charlie to tell him the old man was

coming. So Charlie was never caught napping. But on this particular day the old man arrived at tea-time, and Charlie was smoking a cigar. The old man sat down to a cup of tea. He sniffed the air. "That's a very good cigar you're smoking, Charlie." It was. About £10 a hundred. "Not bad," said Charlie. "Will you try one?" And he handed him the box. The old man took one, and smoked. "A very good cigar, Charlie. What did you pay for them?" "Oh," said Charlie, "I got them from a pal of mine. He lets me have them for fifty shillings a hundred." "Indeed," said David, and he emptied the box out on to the table and proceeded to count them. "That works out," said he, "at sixpence a cigar. A very good cigar for the money. There are ninety-four left," said he, putting them back in the box. "Well, Charlie," and he put his hand in his pocket and took out some money—"ninety-four sixpences is two pound seven shillings and sixpence for the one I'm smoking, for I won't rob you, and I'll take them, and you can get some more."

I had been out quail-shooting with Charlie one day, and we were having a whisky-and-soda when we heard a motor driving up. Charlie looked out of the window. "Great Scott," he said, "it's the old man in a taxi." David Mitchell had sprung a surprise. "Put the whisky-bottle under the table," said he. And in its place he put a half-consumed bottle of David Mitchell's white wine—for he had a vineyard not far away. The old man disliked Charlie drinking whisky, but liked him to drink his own wine. The old man came in and shook hands with me. He liked me because he had known father. He glanced at the white-wine bottle, and smiled a pleased smile. "Perhaps Oscar would prefer whisky," he remarked. "No, thanks, Mr. Mitchell; I love this wine," I lied. "Good job, too," said Charlie. "We've got no whisky in the house." "I fancied I smelt some when I entered the room," replied the old man. Of course, we both feared discovery. But something had caught the old man's ears through the open windows. The meter of the taxi ticking up the fare. He rushed out to the taxi and back again. "I can't stay longer," he said. "That damned taxi is ticking up sixpences every minute I am talking to you. It will be a ruinous fare by the time I get back home." "Oh, don't go, father," said Charlie. "I've a long letter I want to read to you from — about those sheep." "Send the damned letter on to me"—and he rushed out, and off went the taxi and David. "That was a near thing," said Charlie. "He'd have followed that scent and run the bottle to earth."

During this Melbourne season we put on *Count Hannibal*, which had a great success. In fact, *The Virgin Goddess* was our only failure. One night I was playing *Count Hannibal*. I had been playing in a cricket match that day. When I took my call after the first act, someone in the dress-circle box on my left threw a cricket-ball

straight at me. I saw it coming, made a fluky catch, and flung it back, but the boxite did not make so good a catch. It caught him on the nose. It got quite a good round.

After a second season in Sydney and a third and final season in Melbourne, we sailed on the *Orsova* on our way home. We had a wonderful send-off, thousands and thousands crowding the pier to wish us God-speed. I was able to tell them we were returning in two years' time. We were booked to play a fortnight in Perth on our way home, picking up the next Orient liner; but the Meynell-Clarke management begged us to cancel this. "There is a strike on in Perth," they told me on the boat as we were about to leave. "All trains and conveyances and communication of every kind have stopped. Now you have made a nice big sum on this tour. It will only cost us one hundred pounds between us to cancel the date. If you play, you'll play to nothing."

I refused. I told them as we had made so much money we could afford to lose at Perth, rather than break faith with the public. We arrived at Perth, and the strike was still on; all public conveyances at a standstill, and likely to remain so. But we found that practically every bookable seat for our fortnight's season had been sold. And we played to capacity houses every performance. People walked miles to the theatre and back again. People drove in and rode in from country districts within a radius of a hundred miles, and put up at the hotels and every place where a bed could be found. People from the adjacent suburbs and townships made up parties and drove in on lorries or farm-carts and back after the performances. Every conceivable form of conveyance was put into commission and the strikers took advantage of their holiday by coming too. We played to record business, and every night foot and mounted police had to control the crowds. So much for the strike.

After our wonderful season at Perth was over, we spent the week-end by crossing over to Kangaroo Island. I do not know who suggested it, or why. It was, I believe, an invitation from some former member of the Government. Anyhow, we accepted. There was a black convict prison over there, and some Government cottages, where we were to stay and sleep. About twenty of us went. It was a little Government tugboat that took us across. Of course, there was no cabin, just the plain, bare, unsheltered deck. I have travelled thousands of miles on the sea in my life, in all sorts of craft, and I have been in some pretty bad seas, but this joy-trip was an easy first. She did everything, this little tug. She was versatile, and she showed us every trick she knew, or anyone had ever imagined. And like a music-hall comedian, if she thought we had not appreciated a trick or a joke, she repeated it until we did, and

then she would pass on to something else. And her audience started by taking a great interest, a tense interest in her jokes and gambols. Being as impervious and thick-skinned to such antics as I am to the stings of mosquitoes, I could watch the effect of her performances on those she was entertaining. Their interest gave way to phlegmatic lassitude, to coma, until one by one they lay prone, indifferent to everything she offered. At last we reached the Island. There was no quay. Little boats manned by black prisoners came alongside. We had to get into them. There was no ladder, no companion-way. We just had to drop over the bulwarks into the cockle-shell below. Or, rather, sometimes it was well below, sometimes it was well above us. It all depended which was on which wave. It was a giant see-saw. Slowly the audience, wet and in various shades of pea-green, rose from the deck, and it was explained to them how they were to reach terra firma. They looked over the side. For some of them that was enough, and they staggered away to different parts of this Bouncing Bess to suffer in private. But there is no privacy on a tiny boat. It was some time before the first adventurer made an effort, and then only because the horribly healthy man at the wheel said the weather was going to be bad, and that we had better go whilst it was fine. I think the member for the Government went first. The rest followed like sheep. Some had a long jump, some did not jump at all, just scraped off the side of the tug by the rising boat as a limpet off a rock. Lil fell in as gracefully as she could, looking like Ophelia must have looked in her watery grave. And on top of her jumped our heavy woman. No apology was tendered, none asked for. I went in a boat with Grimwood. We had to drop him in, the two healthy men of the crew and myself. He had started spouting some of King Lear's speeches about the storm. I think he was a bit lightheaded, because when we told him to jump, he said hysterically: "Oh, yes, jump, Kangaroo Island, Kangaroo jump." Then we dropped him in. It was not a long row to shore, but long enough for most. And then we went to the Government cottages. Overrun with beetles, and black convicts to wait on us, and all the food we had brought with us for our beautiful week-end well soured with salt water. Fortunately they had made some provision for us, but few of the joyous throng fancied food. Drink—yes! We had that unspoiled. And it was most popular. At last night came, but long before that most were in a comatose state. The morning was beautifully fine, and the sun shone, but so it had the day before, and now the wind had increased and we had the trip all over again, all in the same frisky little tug, if we wanted to catch the liner. So that day was not enjoyed. There was absolutely nothing to do. Nothing to see. We bought a few kangaroo rats to take home as a memento, but they never reached home.

Getting back on the tug from the rowboats was even worse than getting off. And the trip back was worse, and it was a sorry crowd who boarded the dear old Orient liner for home.

And oh! how we all hated that member of the Government.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Count Hannibal"; "Kismet", and second Voyage to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

WE arrived home in London some time in September. Carl Leyel, our manager, had taken a three-months' lease of the New Theatre, where we were to produce *Count Hannibal*. This was produced in October and proved a big success, having to move it to the Garrick when our lease ran out at the New. After *Count Hannibal* had finished its run of about 200 performances, we put on a revival of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. I gave it a jolly Christmas-card setting of snow. In the street and field scenes the stage was covered about four inches deep in salt. All the characters wore mufflers and mittens or gloves, with cold, red noses; and indoors there were blazing wood fires. Of course, some of the papers took me to task for breaking away from the conventional setting, generally summer. But, as I was able to point out to them, Shakespeare distinctly places it either in the winter or early spring—certainly not later than the last week in March, and there has often been snow in March. Anyhow, the trees are not in leaf, coursing is in season or only a fortnight over, fires are in the houses, and the last scene is in Windsor Park, because Herne the Hunter doth all "the wintertime", etc. Dozens of quotations prove it winter or early spring. But a critic is like a woman. Convince him against his will, and he is not only of the same opinion still but nastily so.

The Wives ran to fair business for six weeks, and would have run on, but that we had got hold of what we thought was a winner, *Kismet*! And this is the story of *Kismet*!

One day in the Carlton Grill I met my old friend, Jimmy Fagan, who told me he had just read an Eastern play he thought would appeal to us. I think he sent it me next day. It was by Edward Knoblock, and entitled *Hajj's Hour*. I took it home and read it on Sunday morning. Then I read it to Lil, and with the perfume of the East still in our nostrils we were greatly taken with it, and next day those interested in our season were also favourably inclined. Max Reinhardt had some little time previously produced *Sumurun*, which had made a stir in London, but Knoblock had not got his inspiration from that. It had been written for some years, and had been hawked about both in London and America without finding a

resting-place, or rather, a promise of production. I saw *Sumurun* at the Coliseum, but thought it had been over-praised. I noticed that many of the Eastern Supers were wearing their street boots and had brown faces and white necks, which does not say much for the stage-manager. But being a foreign production, the critics, as usual, praised it to the skies. Later on one or two of them gave the palm to *Kismet*. Now, as the original play was written, it would have taken about five hours to play. That was a Sunday. On the Monday morning I saw the author's agent. The author was in America. We bought the English and Australian rights of the play on condition that I had *carte blanche* to cut it and adjust it as I thought fit. The American rights, I was told, had already been disposed of. First of all, I renamed it *Kismet*. Then I cut it and introduced the bazaar scene into the play. Next, as the small stage at the Garrick would not allow of rapid change of the heavy sets, I built an apron stage over the orchestra, and relegated the orchestra, split into two, to the two slip boxes, hidden by Eastern lattice-work. In order to occupy the attention of the audience between the scenes whilst the sets were being changed, I arranged for a front cloth representing a wall, with pillars in front of it. Before this the action of the play was carried on in mime to music. This has since been extensively copied and was the origin of the trailer curtains used in so many revues for dancers and singer to beguile the audience whilst scenery is changed behind.

I had been rehearsing about a week when the agents sent me another copy of the play, which they said was the latest. I read it and rejected it. The part of Hajj had been turned into a venerable and pathetic figure. I stuck to the original. I was told Tree had the play for some time, and also H. B. Irving, but both had turned it down. When Knoblock, the author, arrived from America he took exception to my reading of the part of Hajj. I was making him a grim comedian, a comic rascal, murderer and thief. After drowning the Wazir, the author had written a prayer for Hajj to address to Allah about a page in length. I had cut it down to four words, "Glory be to Allah." "You'll get a laugh," the author protested. "I hope so," I replied. And I always did. I could not see my way to play it, as he intended, as a straight, dramatic figure. Anyhow, the play and the part made a success. And when Guitry, I think it was, played it in Paris, following the author's intention, it was a costly failure. And, incidentally, so it was when the author produced it himself at the Oxford in about 1925. This only to show that authors are not always the best judges, or that they at times write better than they wot of.

Kismet was only four weeks in rehearsal and cost only £3,530 to produce. One does not steal one's own money. It ran to record

business from 19th April, 1911, to 20th January, 1912, the day before we left again for Australia. The last night was the record night of the run. Although the American rights of *Kismet* lapsed a day or so before I produced it, they were sold again to another American manager without offering them to us. But the American manager paid us the great compliment of sending someone over who sat through performance after performance until every bit of business, every innovation I had made, was carefully committed to paper. All these were afterwards reproduced in America without even the courtesy of acknowledgement. And Otis Skinner played the part in the same vein as I played it. And it was a huge success in America. But not content with stealing all my ideas, they tried to steal several members of our company, offering them 5 per cent. and 10 per cent. increase on the salaries we were paying. Perfectly legitimate, I suppose, but scarcely cricket. But, with two exceptions, our company was loyal. And Christopher Wilson, who had composed the incidental music, refused a tempting offer to sell his score. But then he came from an old Derbyshire *cricketing* family.

We had played *Kismet* something like 250 times when I received a message from the Lord Chamberlain to call upon him. I did so. He had received a complaint that during the course of the play a naked girl appeared, and that this had given offence in certain quarters. He admitted having witnessed *Kismet* three times and had not noticed the incident. I explained to him that in the harem scene a slip of a girl about sixteen walked to the edge of the bath in a blue cloak. This she threw off, and for a fleeting second one saw a glimpse of a graceful, boyish figure in a shaft of moonlight diving into the water. The girl, of course, was clothed from neck to heel in silk fleshings. That was all that was seen of her. The Lord Chamberlain, the late Lord Sandwich, announced his intention of seeing it again. He did so, and told me he could see nothing objectionable in it. Their Majesties—it was Coronation year—had also seen *Kismet*, and had complimented us on the beauty of the production. But the Mayor of Portsmouth had raised the objection. Now it happened that we had sold the provincial rights of *Kismet*. It was to be produced exactly as we were doing it. But the artistic people in connection with the tour decided to improve on the London production. So at Portsmouth and, I suppose, in other towns, instead of the slip of a girl in a shaft of moonlight, six local beauties, apparently voted for by the clientele of the theatre the week before, walked on from the wings into the harem. As they did so, the lights were turned up full blaze, and the sweet buxom beauties waddled across in Indian file, all draped, ogling the occupants of the stalls. Arrived at the edge of the bath, each beauty threw off her drapery in turn, exposing to her admirers and others in the



AS HAJJ IN "KISMET"

auditorium her full-blossomed charms—this was before the days of shingle and sandwich-board figures—and, after posing for a few seconds each in turn, dived in—and took what we used to call a “belly-buster”. But, not content with this, they emerged from the bath at the other end and waddled across the stage again, like so many ducks, their hair hanging down like so many Skye-terriers after a washing, their fleshings sticking to them in varied wrinkles, and then with their draperies mercifully thrown round their hideousnesses, made their exits, their goggled eyes flashing glad glances to their admirers in front. Naturally the Mayor objected to such an exhibition, but he was informed by those connected with the show that they were only doing what Oscar Asche was doing in London. Hence the objection by the Lord Chamberlain.

During the Coronation week, which was very hot, Herbert Grimwood, who was playing the Wazir, whom I, as Hajj, used to drown in the same bath in the harem scene, and I had lunch at the Royal Automobile Club one day before the matinée. Grimwood, on our way to the theatre, complained about the heat, but added that he was looking forward to being thrown into the cool water of the harem. He kept on repeating this, as was his wont, and so I had a joke and a surprise for him. I told the electrician to heat the water up, which he did. When it came to the moment for me to lift him up and throw him in, I did so with more violence than usual, making certain he would reach the bottom. As he rose to the surface and swam to the other side, where I used to meet him and hold his head under water, or appear to do so, his face was lobster-red and he was spluttering with laughter. “You old ——” he began, but down went his head under the steaming water before he could get the word out. Then, as he came up again, I would say: “I’ll give you cool water, you old——” and down he went again. He never got the word out, though I guessed it. After I eventually let him go, he swam off under water, as usual, out of sight of the audience, and for the remainder of the scene he lay on the side of the stage, cackling and hysterical with laughter. When the curtain fell he got up and came over to me. I was quite helpless with laughter at the side of the bath, so he tripped me in, but I managed to pull him in after me and we had a good old ducking-match. Of course, I had to change everything for the last scene, so he got the better of the joke in the end.

As I have already mentioned, we played *Kismet* right up to the last moment before sailing again to Australia. This time Lil and I, together with three other members of the company, left a fortnight ahead of the rest, so that we might spend some time in Ceylon. Arrived there, we made our headquarters at the Galle-Face Hotel, and after a couple of days in Colombo we hired a couple of cars driven by native chauffeurs and started off on a tour of the

Island. We motored about one hundred miles a day, putting up for the night at Government rest-houses, which were often far from restful. In all, the trip lasted about ten days. We visited all the places of interest, the buried cities, as far as Trincomalee, and I can thoroughly recommend this trip as a pleasant break on the long voyage to Australia. One day, a particularly hot one, we were motoring through the jungle when we suddenly struck what appeared to be a snow-storm. The air was so thick with white flakes that it was impossible to see more than a few feet ahead of us, but the chauffeur did not slow down. It was a cloud of white butterflies, and we swept through them for about three miles before we were clear. On pulling up, the radiators were several inches thick with their bodies and white wings. In one part we motored past trees growing through ruins of an old city, by name Anuradhapura. We were told that this city had at one time a population greater than London and had suffered raids from the north time after time. It was a most picturesque trip, the water buffalo pulling the primitive ploughs through the paddy-fields, belly-deep in mud and water, the elephants at work, and the thousand and one coloured dresses of the natives, the yellow-robed Buddhist priests with their umbrellas and the ubiquitous beggar and fakir, men with their hands clenched for years until the nails of their fingers had grown through their hands from palm to back, and monstrous cripples of every sort of loathsomeness. We ascended hundreds of steps in one place to a long gallery of giant Buddhas, and here one of our party, being fatigued with the long climb, sat herself down on a bowl of sacred rice—and what a hullabaloo there was. At Trincomalee the keeper of the rest-house was an old fellow about ninety years of age, a well-known character, and a famous *chef*. But when we arrived he was in a bad temper, and the meal placed before us was both scanty and unappetizing. One of the party asked him could he not cook us something? No, he could not. Then I spoke to him, telling him how disappointed we were. His fame as a cook had been spoken of in the big London restaurants, the Savoy, the Carlton; his curries had been copied there, but, so those who spoke of him, not equalled. That was why we had come to Trincomalee. With one sweep of his hand he had cleared the table of the uninteresting cold chicken and tinned tongue. "I will cook for you. You shall see." And we did. He served us with adroitly-blended cocktails whilst we waited. In half an hour he served us with a curry. A curry. Oh, shades of Guilford Street boarding-houses and curried rabbit! This was the curry of curries. It tickled and appeased, excited and satisfied. It heated and it cooled. It gripped you by the hair of your head until your eyes streamed with tears, then flung you into a veritable paradise of shampoo. And the rice, each grain a pearl. And the Bombay

duck toasted just sufficiently and the chutney and the et cetera, et cetera. And he stood behind us, watching. And one of us disliked curry, and she said so. He glared at her. She asked for cold chicken. No, she could have nothing. Curry or starve. And she starved. We had delicious coffee. No cup for her. We slept the sleep of tired children. She lay awake all night, and the light of her candle showed up in monstrous size the lizards and creepy-crawlies which inhabited her sleep room and journeyed hither and thither over the white walls and ceilings. I dreamt of all the ingredients of the curry. The grey-coloured prawns in the azure sea turning coral-red in the boiling-pot, the mango tree being robbed of its fruit, the funny little Ceylon pig, the fish being dried in the sun, the coco-nut being cracked, and the kernel grated, the tender bamboo shoots, the spices, the peppers, the mustards, the tiny little onions, the olive-oil, and the score of other things of earth, sky and water that had gone to the making of this old man's crafty dish. I forget his name. I can easily look it up. But those who have been there will remember. What's in a name? For him the *cordon bleu*, surely.

The last two days of our fortnight we spent in Colombo and joined the *Osterley*, on which the remainder of our principal members were. The smaller-part members were travelling via the Cape on, I think, a White Star boat. When we were in the middle of the Indian Ocean and they were in the Atlantic, with the vast continent of Africa between us, we sent them a wireless message and received one in reply. At that time this was looked upon as a marvellous achievement. How quickly times change!

We arrived in Melbourne about the end of March and received an even greater reception than before. We opened with *Kismet*, which met with its usual success. No need to dwell in detail on this tour. We did a very fine production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. and also revived the old favourites. It was during this season, whilst playing *Othello*, that my old mother died in Melbourne. I played *Othello* the night she died. And I did not go to her burial in Sydney. For this I was in some quarters severely criticized, as being heartless and mercenary. But it was the old lady's wish. In her last conscious moments, when I was with her, she expressed her wishes, she almost commanded me, with that flash of her black eyes as She who must be obeyed, that I must keep faith with my public. "I am nothing to them," she said, "and I want you to go on playing. And you are playing my favourite part, *Othello*." And so, at her wish, I played that night. And I did not go to her funeral in Sydney, which would have meant closing the theatre for four nights and causing loss of money to those I was under contract to. It meant no loss to me. But because I did not parade my grief and make an advertisement out of my loss, I was told I was heartless and mercenary, by

some narrow-minded, ignorant people, among them a relative with more tongue than brains.

Whilst playing in Brisbane I met Rider Haggard, and he persuaded me to dramatize his book, "A Child of Storm," an Allan Quartermain story with a Zulu setting. I decided to do this, and in order to get local colour I booked a tour through South Africa on our way home. But before this we broke fresh ground in New Zealand. Here we also met with great receptions and success. Both country and people are quite different to the mainland, being much more English in atmosphere and character. We had brought over from London our own car, a Napier, and our chauffeur, and many thousand miles we travelled in it over Australia and New Zealand, and afterwards in South Africa. As before, we lived in the open air whenever we were not in the theatre, having a picnic every Sunday, wet or fine.

On our return to Australia from New Zealand, we presented at Melbourne a very magnificent production of *Antony and Cleopatra*. The scenery, as usual, by Joseph and Phil Harker and the costumes designed by Percy Anderson and carried out by B. J. Simmons. We produced this at the Theatre Royal, Melbourne, which, owing to the great depth of the stage, we were able to produce on a scale which only one other English-speaking theatre, Drury Lane, would permit of. I had the stage cut away for twenty feet from the footlights. The scene was Cleopatra's palace. A flight of steps started at the back of the stage about seventy feet from the footlights. These steps led down to a platform, and from the platform another flight of steps led to the stage-level, and from this another flight of steps led down the twenty feet cut below the stage. The Roman Ambassadors waiting for an audience with Antony heard the clash of cymbals and the sound of music in the distance. They turned and looked up-stage. And down these long flights of steps came musicians and dancers and incense-burners, and then a bevy of girls with long ropes of flowers, harnessed as it were to a great wooden platform carried on the shoulders of twenty negro slaves, and on this platform, on a couch rich with coloured cushions, draperies and lion-skins, reposed Cleopatra, habited as Venus, and Antony as Bacchus, with Cupid at their feet, drinking wine and crushing fruit into each other's lips. Following this the courtiers and courtesans of the court, in a state of wild drunkenness. For a moment this procession halted before the Ambassadors, only to proceed, after a few words from Antony, down the steps, laughing and dancing to the music, until all had disappeared below the stage and out of sight, leaving the Ambassadors gazing down after them. This was the only stage in Australia I could do this on. At other theatres the procession had to pass off at the wings, I made use of this same cut and depth of

stage in our production of *The Dream*. In one of the wood scenes, Titania's Bower, this cut became a fern-clad gorge, up and down which the little fairies, represented by little children of eight and ten years of age, flitted like so many hued butterflies and moths.

During this tour *Kismet* dances were arranged in every city we visited, at which nothing but Oriental costumes were worn. We had a very big one at both Melbourne and Sydney.

Apart from dances and our Sunday picnics, we used to attend every race-meeting within reach. Of Australian racing and other sports I shall have more to say in another chapter. We also had a fairly useful cricket team in the company, and played many enjoyable matches. And, of course, there was golf. So the tour passed very pleasantly away. Again we ended our Australian tour in a blaze of record business at Perth. Perth is more English than any other Australian city. Many of the inhabitants who take a holiday prefer to take a trip to Ceylon, which is just about the same distance by sea as Sydney, and consequently they are more in touch with English people. In Perth there is not, or was not up till 1924, a really good hotel, but it has one of the most pleasant and comfortable clubs in Australia—the Weld Club. Here we were always offered the greatest hospitality.

From Perth we trained it to Albany, whence we sailed in the *Nestor* for Durban in August, 1913. We arrived in Durban, where our old friend and musical conductor, Chris Wilson, was waiting for us. He had come out specially to study Zulu music for Haggard's play. Also our manager had engaged a Captain James Stewart, an expert on Zulu history and life, to undertake the making of costumes and weapons. From Durban, where we opened, we made several excursions with Stewart into the country, visiting various kraals. One particularly hot day, we had a tramp of over eight miles single file over sand covered with a low-growing scrub. The heat was intense, and our tongues were hanging out with thirst. Especially Chris Wilson. At last we reached the native kraal, and crept into the chief's big hut. Stewart explained the necessary ceremonials, and then added: "They will now hand you round beer." At the mention of the word "beer" Chris's eyes nearly jumped out. "Out of politeness, you must drink some," added Stewart. "Politeness doesn't make any difference to me," said Chris. As a big black gourd was handed to him, he closed his eyes. He had seen what he took to be white froth on top. That was sufficient for him. He closed his eyes and closed his hands round the gourd, lifted it to his lips and poured in a pint down his open throat, a trick he had learnt in Germany. But his palate pulled him up. His eyes opened and he smacked his lips. "Beer!" he exclaimed. "Beer!" and he handed on the beastly fermented mealy drink. But

as there was no other liquid, he soon acquired a taste, and had his fill.

We stayed at the Marine Hotel, Durban, and it was a sight in the morning to sit on the balcony and watch the antics of the black rickshaw boys, mostly men of six feet and over, almost naked but weirdly decorated with feathers and buck-horns, shells and horses' tails, their bodies and legs painted with all kinds of colour according to individual fancy. They stand between the shafts and bound up into the air with strange cries. They look hardy enough, but I am told their life is a very short one, brought about by their arduous calling.

The theatre in Durban was a very poor thing, badly equipped and appointed in every way. But the audiences there are most enthusiastic. In fact, all the theatres we saw in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town were at that time very old-fashioned and shoddy. From Durban we trained to Johannesburg. And of all the God-forsaken places! They tell you that the Rand Club there has the longest bar in the world. Well—they need it. We played, I think, nine weeks there. We visited the native compound, where special dances had been arranged for us to see, for the people in Jo'burg, unlike the place itself, are most pleasant and hospitable. Captain Stewart also took us to native kraals to get local colour. In Johannesburg, or near-by, I heard the most wonderful and thrilling band in the world. There were about one hundred and fifty natives, all playing on the Kaffir piano after the style of the xylophon. The deep bass consisted of thick slips of wood over large beer-barrels and the highest tenor one (forgive my lack of knowledge of musical terms, but you know what I mean) was held up by the performer's toes as he lay on his back and played. He was apparently the conductor or leader, for he started by striking a couple of notes and then in came the whole hundred and fifty. The rhythm was perfect. It throbbed through the air and through your body. It gripped you by the throat. It was as God speaking. The earth trembled with the very soul of it. And then a rush of painted warriors, with their assegais and knobkerries, leaping, springing into the air to the beat of it. And then at the very height of—do you call it the crescendo?—when you could not imagine how it could be topped, a mighty and sudden and complete crash—of silence. But only a musician who has heard it could attempt to describe it. I looked at Chris Wilson, a great musician—dead now, poor lad—and he was trembling from head to foot, the tears rolling down his cheeks. He could not speak of it for long after, and then only in exclamations of wonder. It was worth even the enduring of Johannesburg to experience that.

Here I met again an old Bensonian, one Ernest Langley, well-known now in Africa and prosperous. Not as an actor, for he was

a very poor one, though a good sport. He belonged to our firm in the Benson crowd. The trio of Hignett, Langley and Asche. And Hignett was with us on this trip. And we all three talked long and long of the old times. And Grimwood told us of his old times in South Africa in the Boer War, and, as ever with Grimmie, they were amusing. He had gone out with the Duke of C——'s Own, and he with many, if not the lot, of his crowd were captured by the Boers and well guarded. Now all those who had enlisted in the Duke of C——'s Own, had or were supposed to have, money, and so they were well supplied by the Boers with such delicacies as they could afford to pay for—by cheque. Ordinary prisoners they used to strip of rifle, ammunition and so on, and let them go again, but rich ones they stuck to. One night a Gordon Highlander was among the crowd captured. He was near Grimmie and marked that he was given much better food than he, the G.H., was, and asked the reason why. So Grimmie told him it was on account of his uniform, and knowing that the Highlander would be turned away in the morning, he proposed they should change uniforms. Which the G.H. consented to. So in the morning Grimmie was, as a Gordon Highlander, kicked out of the camp, and the Gordon Highlander, as one of the Duke of C——'s Own, remained behind. And that is how Grimmie escaped in the Boer War. In the Great War, 1914-1918, he was also captured twice and escaped. But of this hereafter.

After Johannesburg we played one week at Pretoria, and thence to Cape Town, after a most tiring and uncomfortable railway journey. Now Cape Town—ah, Cape Town—is well, the antithesis to Jo'burg. We stayed at the Mount Nelson Hotel, a well-kept, well-appointed place, with good service and a good kitchen. There is wonderful bathing to be had, and we had several delightful motor-trips and picnics by the sea. But the theatre there was as bad as all the rest. It was now Christmas time, 1913, and there were strikes and threatening of strikes. We had our Christmas dinner alfresco by the sea, and at night a supper-party and dance at the hotel. We sailed the following day on the *Archises*, and I believe ours was the last boat to leave for some time owing to the strike.

After a most uninteresting voyage home, we arrived about the third week in January. We were booked to open at the Globe Theatre the beginning of March, in a revival of *Kismet*, and so, as it meant no fresh study for me and only a couple of weeks rehearsing the company, I decided to spend the intervening time with my hobby—my very expensive hobby—greyhounds. And I suppose I have spent as many happy hours and days with my dogs, and perhaps happier, than one can spend with human beings.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Coursing

AS greyhounds have played such an important part in my life, I am going to devote one chapter to them and to my experiences at coursing. As I have already stated, my father gave me my first greyhound pup when I was about twelve years old. Later on, this dog was the sire of a litter, out of a very clever bitch. I had, as one of the conditions, second choice of the litter, and I chose a fawn bitch with a black nozzle and a splash of white down her throat and chest, and I gave her the kennel name as Nelly. What her running name would have been I don't know. She never ran at a coursing meeting, but she was very clever and had a decent burst of speed. This was after I left the Melbourne Grammar. She was my constant companion, with the exception of my trip to China and back, until I left Australia. She slept on my bed at night and followed me wherever I went, not as a pleasure, to judge by her disapproving look, but as a duty. She took no notice of anybody else. I was her god. During my roaming about the country, of which I have already written, we had several good runs after puss, and it was seldom indeed that the hare got away. That was only at the beginning and end of my journeyings, early spring and early autumn. Old Sambo took a delight in it, too, galloping along after Nelly as she turned and wrenched her game, always on the scut, and Parkes, the wire-haired terrier, barking along in the rear. Well, Nelly died soon after I left Australia. My next experience of greyhounds was in London, at the Adelphi. Lil used to make her appearance as Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*, holding two longtails in leash. Well, when we went on tour, I used to take the dogs out and sometimes got a course. I remember getting a pretty stiff one over the Braid Hill Golf Course at Edinburgh, one early morning. As it was a mountain hare she got well away. At the most the brace were only fair-looking sausages, but it was fun and exercise taking them out, though they never even reached a hare to turn it.

When I went to Australia in 1909 we opened with *The Shrew*, and several good dogs were offered me. This started the fever in me again, and I bought several pups and running dogs, which were trained by Tom White, the premier trainer, and my dogs ran at Geelong, Rorty Hill and other places, but with little success. As

we had contracted to return to Australia in 1912, I arranged with old Tom to breed some for me and have a kennel ready by my return. This he did. During the coursing seasons of 1912 and 1913 I ran a good many dogs. At last I purchased a clinking good dog which I named Over Always, a black, weighing about 70 lbs. He ran for me in the Waterloo Cup at Sydney but in an undecided race against the favourite, his litter brother, he injured himself and in the run off was only just beaten. I ran many dogs with varying success at Rorty Hill, an enclosure, but it was not until I reached Adelaide in South Australia that my luck in a way turned. Tom White had brought over from Melbourne several of my dogs, including Over Always, O Allah, and a little bitch, Loyal Lady. Over Always we entered for the Rosy Fawn Cup at Plympton, which he won easily. So fast was he that he was nicknamed the Black Streak. He was the fastest dog perhaps I ever saw run. I entered Loyal Lady and O Allah for the open Waterloo Cup, run on Angus Plains. Open coursing is, when one walks up one's game. The plains are about 80 miles out of Adelaide, with a very bad road in places. A member of my company, Herbert Grimwood, a very dear fellow but most excitable and erratic, had, the night before the meeting, expressed a desire to see some coursing, and at once accepted my invitation to come with me. When I told him the hour of starting from the hotel in the motor, viz., 4 a.m., his face fell. However, he would keep his word. He was called the following morning at 3.30, and off we started, without breakfast, for our four hours' trip. He slept all the way. Arrived at the plains, I woke him up, went into the local shanty and had a rough breakfast. Before the first dogs went to slips, Tom White came to me and said: "There's a bitch here, sir, you ought to buy, and I think she'll win the Cup." He led me to where the dog-carts were lined up. He was a little distance ahead of me, when in passing a buggy to the step of which were fastened a couple of greyhounds, one of them, a bitch, suddenly jumped up at me, put both forepaws on my chest, wagging her tail and looking into my face. "Nelly," I whispered to her, and it was as the Nelly of twenty-two years ago. Fawn with black muzzle and black-pencilled eyes and the white patch on her throat and chest. I put my face down and she licked all over my cheeks and nose. Tom White had turned. He had missed the cart. "Why, that's the bitch who's making such a fuss of you," he said, adding: "You ought to buy her." "I'll buy her if she's for sale. What do they want for her?" I asked. He advised me not to buy her until after the Cup was over. "Mind you," said he, "I think she'll win, but you would gain nothing by that, because they would want the Cup, anyhow. And they'll ask too big a price for her before running." Anyhow, I was determined to make her mine. It was Fate, Kismet. She was the reincarnation

of Nelly. Later on, I got Tom White, who remembered, apparently, the pedigree of every dog back to Genesis, to look up the pedigree of the dam of my old Nelly, and he found some of the same blood had been outcrossed into this bitch's pedigree. Her name was Ena's Delight, which I afterwards changed to Once Australia. She was by Yankee Doodle-Ena, and the same bred litter, or litters, and also the dam, Ena, had won the Cup, I think, four years in succession. Well, Ena's Delight won the Cup all right, defeating in the final her full sister by an elder litter, I Did It. I Did It ran up twice in the same open Waterloo Cup, and won it the third time. There was a happy click, indeed. I won several hundred pounds on Ena's Delight, after paying my losses on my two dogs, who ran well and raised several flags. The judge, David Mack, used to time every course from when the dogs were slipped until he gave his decision. In the course before the semi-final Ena's Delight was running just over 8 minutes before she killed her hare. And she killed all six hares she ran at. And only ten hares were killed the whole stake.

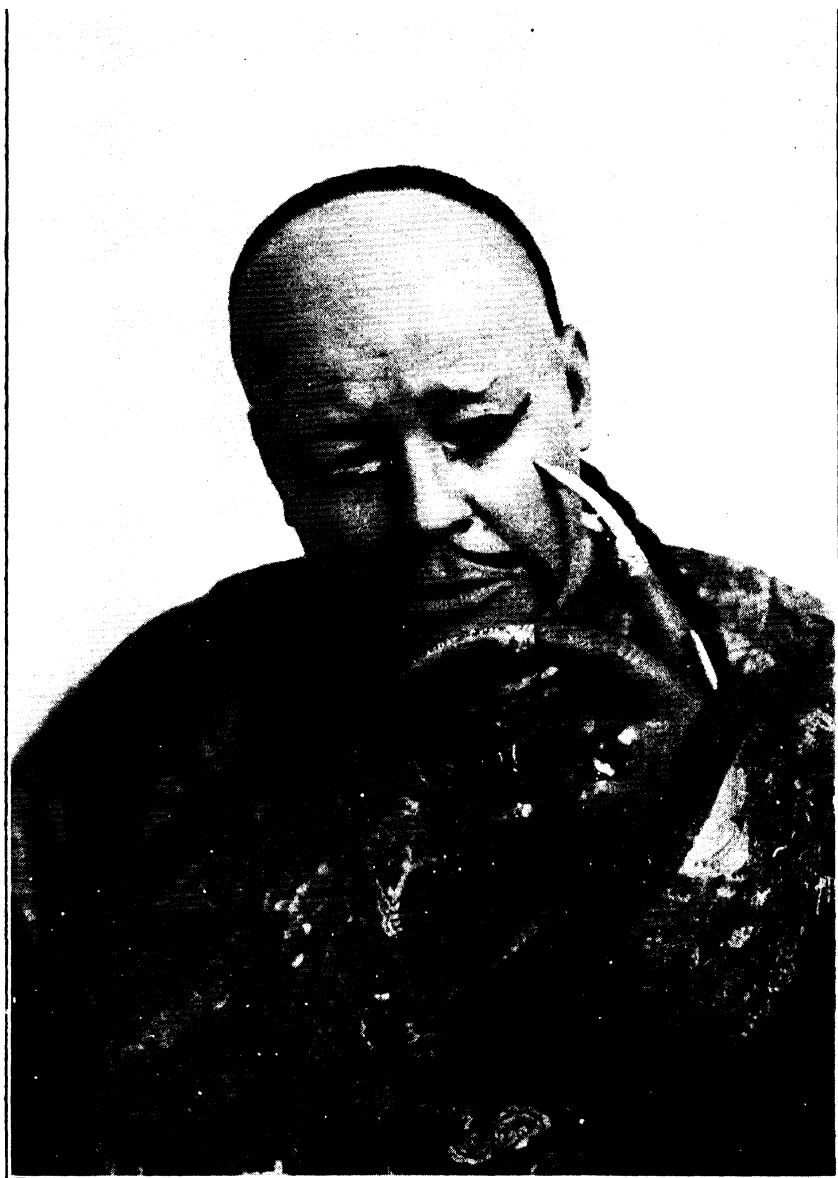
But to return to Grimwood. After breakfast and my interview with Nelly's ghost, we followed the judge and slipper, with the rest of the crowd. We tramped fifteen miles that day, and at 3 p.m. started back in the car for Adelaide, where Grimwood was playing Enobarbus and I Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*. We had had an excellent lunch from a hamper I had taken with me, plenty of cold food and drink. So both of us had a good snooze on the way back. We were just in time to make up and go on for our parts. After the show, Grimwood had supper with me and Lil. He was telling Lil how much he enjoyed the day, when I pointed out the time to him—it was 12.30—reminding him he had only three hours to sleep. "What do you mean?" he exclaimed. I told him we were being called at 3.30. "But we're not doing it again?" I told him it was a three-day meeting. "But, Oscar, I can't possibly do it," he expostulated. I pointed out to him that he could not leave me on my own now, that I could have filled his place in the car easily at first, but not now. Muttering something, he went off to bed. I followed suit. The porter called me at 3.30, adding that he could get no response from Mr. Grimwood. I told him to go back and tell him to hurry. Grimmie had slept in his clothes all night, and was unshaven. He followed me to the car. Again he slept all the way, but woke up for breakfast. Soon after starting our walk behind the judge, however, I missed him, and did not see him again till I returned to the car for lunch, where he was sitting very comfy, sampling the cocktails. Lunch over, nothing would budge him, so I went on alone. Again we got back just in time for the show. After the show Grimwood disappeared. I gave the porter orders not to call us till four, as it was a short day's coursing. He called me at four. He had called

Grimwood, but got no reply. "His door is locked," he added. "Well, you've got a master-key," I reminded him. He came back and told me the lock turned, but evidently the door was blocked with furniture. He could not open it. He waited until I was dressed, and we went to Grimmie's room together. There was only one thing to do, so—one, two, three, both together—and we launched ourselves at the door. There was a smash of something falling inside, and gradually we forced ourselves in. He had barricaded the door with what he could find. This time he was in his pyjamas, in bed, with the bedclothes pulled over his head. He was half-awake. He refused, he expostulated, he swore, he would not come. I got him out of bed. "But I'm not dressed, you damned old fool," he shrieked at me. So I told the porter to take his breeches, coat and shirt, etc., down to the car, saying to Grimmie, "You can dress in the car." Then he began to laugh and tried to make out I was joking. But it was getting late, so I followed the porter, who had collected his raiment, half-carrying, half-dragging dear old Grimmie down the stairs, out in the street, and into the car, where we covered him over with his clothes and the fur rug, and started. He sank into a deep sleep and did not wake until we reached the old shanty, where the crowd, already breakfasted, were waiting for the orders when to start. Grimmie, of course, was in his pyjamas still. The car was surrounded by friends and others chatting to me about the stake, and under these circumstances poor Grimmie found it difficult to dress and retain his dignity. He eventually did so, and followed me to the start, but I knew he would do a bunk, which he did.

Ena's Delight won her semi-final fairly easily, and so went into the final with her sister, but of an earlier litter, I Did It. They were in slips for the better part of an hour, on the walk all the time and in a dust-storm, on a warm day, before they were slipped. Ena's Delight won. Then the owner came up to me and asked me if I wanted to buy her still. Tom White drew me aside. "She's lame," he said, "and they think she'll never be sound again, so if you pretend you're not keen, we'll get her cheap." But I was determined to buy her, whatever happened. Well, the result was, I got her for 100 guineas. Bless her little heart, what she cost me in the end! I found Grimwood waiting for lunch and we got away early. That night, after the show, he said to me, "Never again, Oscar." I went down to see Facey the next morning. That was her kennel name. She lay on her bench. She couldn't move. Tom had given her a hot bath. And he gave her another. But that 8-minute course had told on her now, and it was nearly a week before she could stand up. When she did, she put her head in my hand and feebly wagged her tail.

So I said good-bye for the present to Tom White and the dogs.

I had arranged that he and his son were to bring Ena's Delight, O Allah, Loyal Lady, Blackpan and Over Always over to England, leaving Australia about the middle of September. To this lot I later added a black dog, Captain Wood, winner of Victorian Derby and Cup. I gave 150 guineas for him. Facey had only run twice in Australia. A month before winning the Cup in the open she had won the South Australian Oaks at Plympton, which is an enclosure. Here she had also pulled down every hare. Tom White arranged for kennels to be erected on one of the White Star boats from Australia round the Cape. The day before they were due to sail I received from him a cable informing me that Over Always had broken his neck. On arriving in England the dogs were put in quarantine in Spratt's kennels at Wimbledon, where they met with very poor treatment. In spite of White's protests, each one was washed in hot water, and left out in the open to dry, the day before they were handed over to him. That was in December. I arrived in London from South Africa about the third week in January. Facey, three or four weeks out of quarantine, had been run by White at Southminster in a 16 dog stake and had run up to the winner. She had created a bit of a stir on account of her great cleverness. I think this was a mistake on White's part, running her when only half-fit. On arrival, I found a letter from him telling me where he was—Amberley, near Stroud, Gloucester. So off I went that evening in my car, and eventually, about midnight, found Tom's abode, the Amberley Inn. I called out of the car, "Is Tom White living here?" In answer I heard a dog whining. Tom came with a lantern, and I got out of the car. "Did you hear that bitch?" he exclaimed. "She knew your voice. Well, of all the things I have ever known." He led the way to the stable, where the dogs were kennelled. As soon as she saw me, she went wild, and when I got within reach she was all over me, whining with delight and embracing me. After a little while there, and a look at the other dogs, who were all sleeping we started to leave, whereupon she started to kick up such a hullabaloo that Tom thought it advisable to take her into the house with us. That night she slept on my bed, at the foot, and from that night she never slept anywhere else, if I was there. I had found two nominations for the Waterloo Cup. A Mr. Brown ran Facey (Once Australia) in his nomination, and Mr. George Mayall ran Captain Wood in his. Right up to the Waterloo Cup I helped White and his son train the dogs, getting up at five every morning, and then after breakfast a ten-mile smart walk across Minchinhampton Common, the site of a big Roman encampment, a wonderful spot and most bracing air. The quarantine had ruined Black Pan and O Allah. Neither of them could run after their first course. Then rheumatism would set in. And Captain Wood was never the dog he was. Facey,



As "CHU CHIN CHOW"

also, had lost a bit of her pace, but not her cleverness. In due time we arrived at Formby, near Altcar, and here Tom found quarters, the two dogs sleeping in his room. There was no room for me, so I stayed at the Adelphi.

On the night of the banquet, when the card was called over, I backed Facey at prices ranging from 1,000 to 1 to 1,000 to 6, long odds, to win me a fortune. I also put a few pounds on Captain Wood. In her first course Facey (Once Australia) was drawn against Sylviana Again, one of the cleverest and best bitches, so they said, that had ever come from Ireland. The odds for this individual course were 5 to 1 on Sylviana Again, 4 to 1 against Once Australia. I took £1,000 to £250 as they went to slips. Facey won easily, causing much comment by her close working of the hare. Charlie Mills came over to me and told me Lord Sefton wanted to buy the bitch. What did I want for her? I told him no money could buy her. That was not the only time I was made an offer. In her next course she met Tide Time, a great striding dog, about 68 lbs. Facey was only 46 lbs. They called her the Australian whippet. But she was all quality. I only had a tenner on her at 5 to 1 against, as, barring accidents, she must go under to Tide Time, who was, I believe, favourite for the stake. He led her about six lengths and got the first turn and then the next. His bolt was now shot, and the dear little girl got on to the scut and with one quick move after another worked the score down. The black dog had his ears and tail up now, and was lolloping behind. The longer the hare lived the more she would win by. "If the hare lives a few seconds more we win, and win the Cup," said Tom, who with me was standing within forty yards of where the work was. As he said this she drove into puss and killed too soon. And so my chance of a fortune, that time, had vanished. What did she lose by? Tom and I made it certainly not more than one point. After the black dog chucked it and she got in, she wrenched four times, that is two points, and a kill of merit, two points, total four, to Tide Time's three points for his lead and one point each for two turns, total five. Well, she automatically passed on to the Plate, that is, for the sixteen dogs beaten in their second course. In this she met Stollery's white-and-black dog, Sydney. He was a big, racy-looking dog, and again the bitch went out at 4 to 1 against. I put on £25. I was standing next to Michael Hearn, a fine old Irish courser and sport, he was, and still is. "Is that all you're having on your little bitch?" Then he yelled out to one of the books, "I'll take 800 to 200 the bitch." No sooner was the bet booked than the dogs were slipped. The hare circled round, favouring Facey, and she won, I think, pointless. Then she met the Countess of Sefton's dog, the name I forget. I had £250 on her this time and again she won me £1,000. Her next was Teddington Weir. Again she was at 4 to 1

against, and again I saw her win me £1,000. Then came the final against Fast Sam, a little brother, I believe, to Tide Time, a very fast dog. Tom White wanted to divide the stake, but I would run it out. This time she started even money and I put £2,000 on her. For the first time she led to the hare, and once placed nothing could displace her, such a jealous runner was she. So she won the plate and, after allowing for my bets lost, I made about £4,500. Tom White ran her in the Barbican at Peterborough. In her first course she led by a street, but the hare turned right back to the other dog, who had won before she could get in again. It was one of those cases of the farther she led the more she lost by. Later on, I had two pups from her, both bitches, by False Forecast, both good workers but better brood bitches. I gave Joseph Walker, the judge, one of them, Onward Anzac, as a gift, because he so admired Once Australia. He put her to Husky Whisper II, and I bought the litter of nine for 200 guineas. I promised to give him two of the bitches back after their running career, and I did so when leaving for Australia in 1922, Orient Action and Orient Amiability. In this litter was the best greyhound I ever owned, a brindled (silver-and-black brindle) dog, about 68 lbs. weight, Orient Attraction. He and his litter brother, a similar brindle, Orient Affection, ran in the Sussex Derby, which I had won the previous year with one of my own breeding, Onward Again. He was drawn against Lord Dewar's dog, Dux. He went out at the individual odds of 5 to 1 against. I had fifty pounds on him. He led by a street, worked his hare and killed, but before my lazy trainer could pick him up he got on to a fresh hare and after a good minute and a half single-handed course, killed. I picked him up and, of course, drew him out of the stake. His litter brother divided. About a month later, November, I decided to have some searching trials up at the farm, and arranged for Joseph Walker to judge and Smith the slipper to slip. I ran Orient Attraction against his brother, the divider of the Derby, and he won handsomely. After several courses between other pups, I put him into slips again with a second-season dog, Official Advice, for whom I had given 200 guineas, a good winner and an honest dog. He had not run that day, but Attraction led him and beat him well. So I knew I had a champion. I kept him for the Waterloo Cup to run in my nomination.

I must tell of an incident about old Facey the day of these trials. As usual, she slept on my bed and followed me out and watched the dogs that were to run being put into the motor kennel, snarling at each and every one. Then she jumped up on to my car, thinking she was going. But I lifted her off and carried her indoors, put her on the sofa in the dining-room, by the fire, saying: "No, old lady, you're too old for that." When I returned the trainer's wife told me that as soon as I left she had jumped out of the window and killed

a couple of fowls, though she lived with them daily. She had gone back to the sofa and not moved since. She sulked and would have nothing to say to me. The next day, Sunday, I was showing some people over the farm lands when a hare started up just in front of me. Facey, behind, did not see it. It was soon down the hill towards the pigsties, out of our vision. Facey suddenly started running on its track. She could not possibly see it. She was on its scent. And this is a most common thing. In old age Nature compensates the greyhound for its blurring of sight by giving it a nose. Anyhow, Facey soon sighted it, coursed it out of sight. I sent a couple of the lads to pick her up. About five minutes afterwards her ladyship appears, hare in mouth, which she deposited at my feet and, with a look at me as much as to say, "Am I too old, you fool?" she sulked off into the house. And when I went into the dining-room she shut her mouth pretending she was not out of breath. However, she forgave me and we were on speaking-terms once more. Once before she had shown this jealous temper. I was sitting in the fields with her and the two pups of her first litter. They were about four months old, and I started playing with them and making a fuss of them. This her ladyship did not approve of. If I wanted to make a fuss of anybody, I must make a fuss of her. She pushed the two pups away. I pulled them back. She looked straight in my eyes, and then trotted off. I took no notice until I heard the screaming of hens. She had deliberately trotted off towards a pen of fowls some distance away, killed a couple of hens, and trotted back. Poor old darling, there was no one else in her world but her master, like Nelly in the old, old days.

But to return to her grandson, Orient Attraction. After these trials I made a point of being at the farm as much as possible, right up to a week before Christmas, when he was quite sound and fresh, as was all the kennel. In December I learnt that several bets had been booked against him for the Cup. It was nearly two months before the event, but I put a couple of hundred on him at the short odds of 20 to 1. I had received a big offer for him from a leading northern kennel, but declined it. I had not been down to the farm for a week or so before Christmas Day, when Lil and I had several friends to Christmas dinner, at our house in Abercorn Place. One of the guests during the dinner said to me: "I hear you have got the best puppy seen out for years, and with a chance for the Waterloo Cup." I replied that I had a good pup, but added: "I suppose, though, with my usual luck, he'll either break his neck or be found one night dead on his bench." The following morning my telephone went, and I received over the phone the news that the big fellow, Orient Attraction, had been found dead on his bench at nine o'clock the night before, just about the time I was prophesying disaster.

Then came the news his brother was dead. I could not leave, as we had *matinées* of *Chu* every day. Many died, many were sick. My kennel was depleted. It was not distemper. It was bad food, although I was paying for the best. I had nothing to run in the Cup except Old Ale, an honest third-season dog who had not shown any sign of illness. Him I ordered by phone to be taken, together with a bitch for company, to Formby by my second trainer, kennels found and trained on the spot. When I did go to the farm I found that the only dogs that had not been affected were Facey and a couple of whelps who were fed on house food and not kennel food. To add to my woes, the Sunday before the Cup Old Ale had his tail jammed in the kennel door, and some inches of it had to be amputated. So I had to run a bitch who was far from fit. I think in my coursing career I met with every particular kind of ill-luck. I paid 480 guineas for Scoop, and just before he should have run in the Victory Cup, a substitute for the Waterloo Cup in 1919, he broke his toe. I certainly won one or two stakes, but coursing, from first to last, cost me £45,000 without reckoning what I lost in backing them. I had as many as 72 dogs in my kennels at one time. When I left in 1922 for Australia, all my dogs were sold except Facey, whom an old friend, Mark Lester, took care of till my return. Scoop sold for 12 guineas, but he later sired the winner of the Waterloo Cup, Golden Seal. All the produce of my stock did well, and Once Australia certainly added stamina to the present-day greyhound.

When I came back from Australia in 1924, I went to Mark Lester to see Facey. I went into the kennel where she was alone. She was old and had forgotten me. But I took her back to the farm, and there she recovered somewhat and again knew me. But she was getting round and blind, my poor old bitch, and would walk round the table, stepping over my other dogs, a couple of Springer spaniels, and a couple of White West Highlanders. But though she annoyed them, they respected her old age. Then, on her birthday, 14th September, I was rung up from the farm. She had crawled out on to the lawn, where her bed, an old dressing-gown of mine, was lying, to air, and had passed away on it. So we buried her, all the dogs in attendance at her grave-side, on the spot where she had laid her last hare at my feet. Her little grave is fenced round and a rough stone, with a suitable inscription to Facey. She was exactly fifteen years old. In 1915 I was given a nomination in the Waterloo Cup, which I filled with my own dogs up to and including 1922, when I sailed for Australia. I had quite a number of good dogs, but not a good trainer after Tom White. And I always had the worst of luck. It is a fascinating sport, and once bitten, never shy. But it is a rich man's sport over here, and up north, at any rate, very little courtesy and less hospitality is shown to owners who go to the expense

of entering and travelling their dogs to compete. Down south it is a very different matter, especially with the Sussex Coursing Club. No overbearing manners of feudal times there. I remember one meeting I attended in Scotland. I entered and sent up by road in my motor-kennel five dogs and the two trainers. I followed in my car with Mr. George Mayall and Mr. H. A. Groom, the keeper of the Greyhound Stud Book. On the first morning's coursing, X—X—, a well-known courser and a Waterloo Cup nominator, and I drove out to the meeting. My car, although I showed my credentials, was not allowed to drive through the gate into the fields. No cars were allowed. So we had to pull up at the side of the road, and told the chauffeur to find where the dog-vans, etc., were and wait for us there for lunch. We passed through the gate and started what was a fairly long walk, when through the gate and past us came two or three motor-cars, brakes with postilions on horses, a game cart, and various others all painted in the well-known flaring colours of the lord of the soil, whose particular friends filled the vehicle. "The circus", we christened it. They drove up to where the dogs were in slip. We had to use our own legs. I happened to win my first course with a dog, Onward Again, but hares were scarce and the crowd moved off to another beat, followed by "the circus," with the lord of the soil riding a skewbald or piebald kind of mustang quite Mexican in appearance, and having on mackintosh, long riding-boots, felt hat with a feather of a golden heron, I think, a buttonhole of gardenias and a huge cigar. We tramped back, found our car and had lunch, hot Irish stew, most welcome, as it was a cold day. After lunch X—X— announced his intention of not moving, so I went off to watch my other dogs' performances. At last, some two miles away, I found the crowd. "The circus," together with the conveyances kennelling *their* dogs, were within 30 or 40 yards from the slipper, who was sheltered behind a stone wall. "The circus" had been lunching and were ringed round with a red rope. I had tramped over roots and over wire, and was not in the best of humours when I was informed by a spectator that one of my dogs had been disqualified for not being in slips in time. I looked across at the slipper, and found the blue flag was up, denoting another bye. I looked at my card. It was again my dog not present, Onward Again. I saw one of my trainers, who told me the other dog carts were a couple of miles away, and had received no notice of change of beat. Only the favoured few were in the know. Then came striding over to me another Lord of the Soil, whose dog was in slips with a bye dog, replacing mine. He started in his dictatorial manner: "Look here, Asche, if you can't have your dogs in slips in time, you had better not come coursing." It takes more than a lord of the soil to browbeat or lecture me, and I told him so very plainly.

Then appeared my poor brute of a dog, having been pulled across country, with hares starting up in every direction for some miles, and Mr. Lord condescended: "Well, now he is here he can run." I replied that as the bye-flag was up and another dog in slips, it was, I thought, against the rules. I may be wrong. Anyhow, I knew he was beaten to hand with that handicap, and so he was. In Australia there are no lords of the soil of this class. There, the landowners have passed through a rough school, and are human, if not exactly polished, gentlemen.

When I sailed to Australia, 22nd July, 1922, I still had a dozen or so dogs in my kennels at the farm. These, with the exception of two bitches due to be sent to Mr. Joseph Walker, were put up for sale. Poor old Scoop only fetched 12 guineas, but as he afterwards sired Golden Seal that won the Waterloo Cup in 1927, he proved his worth, and from the two bitches Orient Action and Orient Amiability, many good dogs have been bred, and Orient Amiability as a brood bitch changed hands for 250 guineas. I had intended taking six dogs to Australia for the coursing season there. And I had been assured that they need not go into quarantine if they passed the vet. Fortunately, owing to some misunderstanding, the kennels I had ordered to be built on the *Ormuz* were not ready, so I left them behind. When I arrived at Freemantle some Government officials came on board with orders to destroy Mr. Asche's dogs. After granting permission, the powers that be had thought better of it and had rushed to the other extreme. I did a little coursing in Australia and paid 100 guineas for a dog to run in the Waterloo Cup over there, but unfortunately, owing to the alteration in my plans, I was not able to wait for it, so I left the dog as a present to my trainer. When I returned to England in 1924 I attended the Waterloo Cup of 1925, in which my friend Mr. George Mayall had a white dog Manganese running, and, as he was out of my old Orient Attraction bitches, I was very interested. He ran a good honest dog, but was put out after winning several courses by the eventual winner Pentonville. That was the last coursing meeting I attended, but I hope to renew my acquaintance with the sport and my good friends in the South before very long.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

*London and "Kismet" again—"Mameena"—The Birth and History of
"Chu Chin Chow"*

WE reopened in London at the beginning of March, 1914, with a revival of *Kismet*, or, rather, we continued its run. At once we started breaking all records for the Globe Theatre and for the piece itself. This continued until about the first week in June, when I met with an accident to my foot which laid me up for several weeks, and the business dropped. When I did take up my part again warm weather had set in and already the situation in the Balkans was beginning to be realized in England as serious. And then, on 4th August, came war.

This at once had its effect on the theatre. However, in October we produced my dramatization of Rider Haggard's play, *The Child of Storm*, under the title of *Mameena*. For this we had made most elaborate preparations. Captain James Stuart, who had been assistant-secretary of Native Affairs in South Africa, and had written a book on the great Zulu rebellion, had been roped in, with a bag of gold of considerable weight at the end of the rope, to undertake the superintending of the making of costumes and weapons, and to teach us the manners and customs of the Zulus. To this end three Zulu kraals had been making for three months all the costumes and properties required. This necessitated the hunting and killing of wild animals for their hide and fur, and the tanning and shaping of same, the making of assegais, knobkerries and other offensive weapons, whilst forty oxen, specially chosen for the various colours of their hide, had been killed to provide the eighty war-shields required. Domestic utensils, snuff-boxes, everything had been thought of and made. The cost of this ran into many thousands of pounds, but we possessed a finer and more comprehensive collection of Zulu implements and costumes, etc., than the one in the Berlin Museum.

The play was most carefully rehearsed by me, with Captain Stuart putting us right as regards details. I had the whole of the light battens and lines cleared away, so that from the stage to what is called the grid, from which the light battens and cloths are suspended, there was a clear sixty-two or sixty-four feet. Then round

the stage in a circle, reaching up to the grid, was built a panorama of three-ply wood. Usually panoramas are of canvas, hang like curtains, and are blown about by every wind that blows, and one sees beautiful folds and wrinkles in God's blue sky, and the poor audience is expected to exclaim: "How wonderful!" But this panorama was as solid as a lath-and-plaster wall. It was painted a light-grey colour. For seven feet or so from the floor level it was open, so that flats and properties could be brought from behind the curtain and placed in position. Then behind the curtain, and reaching from one side of the proscenium to the other, I had an iron bridge built. On this iron bridge I could place as many as thirty arc lamps and two magic lanterns or projectors. When in front of the panorama the different set pieces were in position, one could sit in the front row of the stalls (which is the worst seat in the house and the most exacting), and look up or to either side, and see nothing but what appeared to be sky. No old-fashioned sky borders. With the aid of the two magic-lanterns or projectors we were enabled to show the moon rising in the heavens and black storm-clouds moving across the face of the moon, and then the old witch-doctor made them take the form of Zulu warriors, and the audience saw the clouds gradually change into impis of marching Zulus, thousands upon thousands, and fade away. The sky could be a sunset or sunrise or starlit sky, or with dark or light fleecy clouds, or rain or snow or anything one liked to order from the menu. And it looked as Nature. It was Mr. Frederick Worlock who first suggested setting the play this way, and he made several models.

Then we got dear Joseph Harker on to the job of painting the scenery, and Digby carried out my ideas about the lighting. I have no hesitation in stating that this production was the most life-like one ever seen on the London stage, and has never been equalled. Those who witnessed it will, I am sure, agree as to its perfect naturalness. Some of the present-day critics were still at the bottle—the milk-bottle—in 1914, and therefore missed it. Many South Africans wrote me that they were not in a theatre but on the veldt again.

This method of setting and of lighting was later copied by Germany, and it was rather amusing, when I was in Australia in 1922 and 1923, to read in an English paper how a demonstration had been given of a German method of lighting by means of which sunsets, rain, clouds, etc., etc., could be shown on the panorama-cloth. And yet we had done all this in 1914, and carried out by British brains.

Captain Stuart had brought over two Zulu chiefs, but they were not allowed to appear on the stage. This as the result of the behaviour of some white women at the South African Exhibition at Earl's

Court, and which had prejudiced the safety of white women in South Africa. Black Teas, I think they were called. However, these Zulu chiefs were able to teach the London black men and women the Zulu dances and Zulu songs, which are mostly copies from Moody and Sankey's hymns. There was only one white character in the play, Alan Quartermain. Everyone else was black or brown. It used to take me two hours to be made up, coloured from head to foot, and it took the other members of the company a like time, including Lil, who played the Zulu maiden.

The first night was a tremendous success. It was a novelty. London had never before seen what appeared to be real Zulus in all their war rig-out. At the end of the wedding dance, in which over eighty dancers sang and danced till the curtain fell—and then was raised time after time—even the jaded first-nighters got up on their feet and sang the time and stamped with their feet in rhythm. The critics were impressed, and we started off with a wonderful week's business. But then the street-lighting restrictions came in, and for some considerable time the theatres suffered terribly. We did not do rotten business, but just about £100 a week less than our expenses.

Our lease of the Globe was up on 14th, January 1915, so from Christmas-time till then we played twice daily. Theatre-goers had become accustomed to the new regulations by then, and we got some of our losses back. In all we played *Mameena* 133 times, and lost about £8,000 over it. And whilst I was in Australia, the whole Zulu collection was sold for £100!!! One night during the run of *Mameena* I had a joke with dear old Fred Lewis. He played the part of an elderly Zulu chief, the father of the girl I wanted to marry. In one scene I had to threaten him. I used to stride round him as he sat on a little wooden stool outside his hut, waving my knobkerrie in the air and making as if to strike him with it. A knobkerrie, for those who don't know, is a weapon made of wood, a club with a round head about twice the size of a cricket-ball. All the weapons were real ones. But I had asked the property-man to make me a fake one, with a handle of stuffed linen and the head a bladder. When painted you could not distinguish from the real one at a few paces. Well, on the night in question I started dancing round Fred Lewis, striking logs of wood with the real knobkerrie, just to let him see and hear it was O.K. He thought my behaviour strange, and showed it in his face. Then, in passing by the wings, I exchanged the real for the fake. Prancing up to Fred again and waving it round my head, I brought the bladder end right down on his bald head. As he saw it coming he gasped: "My —, he's killed me!" As the bladder struck him with a sounding smack, he tumbled off his stool, and then, cottoning on to it, had to be carried off the stage laughing.

To the audience it was all perfectly natural. The joke was not given away.

After *Mameena* was over and all of military age had joined up, we went round the provinces for a short tour, with a short one-act play called *Hajj*, by the author of *Kismet*—Knoblock. During this I had written a pirate treasure island play called *The Spanish Main*. We produced this at Wimbledon and had a successful tour round the provinces, putting it on at Christmas-time at the Apollo. We only had a few weeks' lease of the theatre, but before leaving we revived *The Taming of the Shrew* again, and then went on tour, the spring of 1916, with both plays.

And then came the world's record-breaker, *Chu Chin Chow*.

How *Chu* came to be written and eventually produced may be of interest to many of those who have seen it. We—my wife and I—were playing in Manchester, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Othello*. We arrived on the Sunday, and on Monday morning we started in our car from the Midland for the nearest golf-links. But before we had gone very far, down came the good old Manchester rain. It had obviously decided to stay, so we turned back to the hotel. "What the devil is one to do all the week here?" I grouched. "Why not write that pantomime you're always talking of?" said Lil. "I will," said I. So a stenographer was sent for, and I started dictating, she, the stenographer, typing it direct. So we went on until 5 p.m. The following morning, as it was still raining, I continued dictating *Chu Chin Chow* from seven in the morning until five in the evening, and only a rest for lunch and tea. By Friday at 5 p.m., exactly one-half of it was typed, lyrics and words and description of costumes and scenery. I remember reading it to my wife, who liked it immensely, and also to my old chief, Sir Frank Benson, who thought it good.

Nothing was done for the next two weeks. The third week, however, I was alone in Glasgow, playing Christopher in the Introduction of *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Alhambra. Having nothing to do in the daytime, I hired a stenographer and dictated to her the second half of the book and lyrics.

On my return to London I read it to one or two friends, who praised it and suggested that both Lil and I should play in it. This had never occurred to me. I would, of course, play *Chu*, but there was no part for Lil. So I introduced the character of Zarat Al Kulub for her. One afternoon I met Freddie Norton at the Green Room Club. I only knew him slightly, but knew of his genius. I hesitatingly mentioned the book to him, and explained some of my ideas. He was struck with it, and took the play home and read it. The following day I met him, and he said he would set it to music.

I offered him 50% of all author's royalties, and he accepted. Then came the question: "Who will do it?" I sent it to George Dance. He quickly turned it down, but consoled me by saying: "If you can get George Graves to play Ali Baba, it might be done as a pantomime in the provinces." So that was that. Next I took it to Robert Evett at Daly's. He kept it a month. I don't believe he even looked at it. But he told me it was no good. "You'll only waste time and money on it, Oscar." I thanked him and stood him a drink. Then I got Joseph Harker, that great artist, to make models of the thirteen scenes I described. I persuaded that other great artist, Percy Anderson, to design the dresses. Then one day, over a very good lunch at the Carlton Grill, I persuaded Henry Dana, Sir Herbert Tree's manager at His Majesty's Theatre, to call together a few friends and hear it read, etc. So one fateful afternoon we foregathered in the Dome at His Majesty's Theatre, Henry Dana, Golding Bright, Joe Langton, Percy Anderson, the Prince of Monaco, my wife, a few friends, Freddie Norton and myself. Freddie sat down at the piano and played the music and sang the songs. I read and explained the play and novelties of production, and displayed the scene models and designs for costumes.

From the first I had no doubt. I could tell that even these hard-hearted knockers approved of it.

The result was that Dana and Langton said: "We'll do it here at His Majesty's Theatre, and Tree must come into it."

They cabled him in America, where he was having a poor time, telling him they were putting £3,000 of his money into it. Lily Brayton put up another £3,000. I, as usual, had no money to put up. And that was the syndicate and the capital. Eastale Ltd., Sir Herbert Tree and Lily Brayton equal shareholders.

Contracts were at once entered into between the parties concerned. The author's royalties were fixed at 6% up to £1,500 a week, and 10% on all over.

Of this Freddie Norton was to receive half, and the other half was divided equally between Miss Brayton and myself, for I had sold half my playright for a mess of pottage. In this way. A few months before this eventful meeting, we were playing in Blackpool. By one morning post came a letter from my bank informing me I was overdrawn to the extent of £400. As I never filled in a butt-end or perused my pass-book, I never knew whether I had a few thousands to my credit or was on the border-line. So I asked Lil to lend me £500. "And on what security?" she asked. "I have no security, but I will sell you one-half my royalties in *Chu Chin Chow* for £500." She, for answer, wrote me out a cheque for this amount and I wrote out in five lines an agreement assigning to her one-half of my author's fees for *Chu*.

The date of production was fixed for either the 2nd or 3rd September, 1916. The announcement was "Early in September a Musical Tale of the East will be produced".

I, of course, was to produce it. I naturally suggested I should be paid a producer's fee. This caused painful expressions on the faces of Henry Dana and Carl F. Leyel and Miss Brayton, and on pressing the subject I was told bluntly I was paid well enough by the royalties as author. As I still argued the point, and asked for £500 as a trifling amount for my services, they told me they would consider the matter.

Two days later Mr. Dana and Mr. Leyel made the following proposition to me: "If *Chu Chin Chow* plays to £50,000 in twenty weeks or less, then we agree to pay you over and above your author's royalties, 20% on all takings in excess of £1,500 a week."

As no play in the history of His Majesty's Theatre had ever played to such figures, an average of £2,500 a week for twenty weeks, this offer amounted to an absurdity. However, it was Hobson's choice, and I accepted. The bond was drawn up by the brothers Shylock, as I christened them, and so we started rehearsals. We rehearsed exactly four weeks. I heard a few days before production that a certain novelty I was introducing of small inset pictures had been stolen, and was being done in a certain revue on the night before my production. To avoid this I determined to produce before the announced date. So on 31st August, 1916, *Chu Chin Chow* was produced, and ran until 22nd July, 1921, nearly five years—longer than the Great War—2,235 performances.

The first night was a great night. The Press the following morning, was, with few exceptions, enthusiastic. Certainly one well-known critic only sat through part of the First Act, but his subsequent adverse opinion of the show did not matter. From the start business was big. Many were the guesses made as to the cost of production, some expert opinions placing it as high as £15,000. The cost of production, including scenery, costumes, properties, preliminary advertisement, cost of rehearsals, etc., etc., all-in-all, when the curtain rose on the first night, was £5,356 17s. 9d. These figures are vouched for as correct by the auditors. Of course, no money was wasted, no money was pocketed by directors, as is done in so many syndicates, the poor shareholder or backer being milked by means of overhead charges—elastic term. Eastdale directors were the shareholders. Business was so big that Mr. Dana and Mr. Leyel suggested an extra matinée per week, and asked for my consent. "Certainly," I answered, "as many as you like." The Shylocks had forgotten. I, the poor little Christian, had not. After we had played seventeen weeks, my returns told me that *Chu* had played to £51,000 in seventeen weeks. I looked at my contract and waited

for the Friday night when I would, as usual, receive two cheques, one for my salary as actor, the other for royalties as author. Friday night came, and with it Mr. Lével with the two cheques, one for about £100, my salary including matinées, the other for royalties amounting to £62 10s., made up as follows :

1½% on £1,500	=	£22 10s. od.
2½% on above £1,500	=	£40 os. od.

I looked at this cheque for royalties and tossed it back across my desk to Lével. "You've made a slight mistake, Carl." He looked at the cheque. "No, Oscar ; it is quite correct." "As far as it goes," I replied, "but you've forgotten my contract." He did not even then remember it. "What do you mean?" "I mean this. Last week we totalled £51,000 for seventeen weeks' business. This week we have played to £3,100. You will find that there is due to me 20% on £1,000 for last week and on £1,600 for this week, or £520 in all." "Good Lord !" he exclaimed, and rushed out of the room. A few minutes later he returned with Lil, her eyes starting out of her head.

"Oscar, what do you mean?" she exclaimed.

"Five hundred and ninety pounds for this week's super royalties, in lieu of the £500 production fee you and the Brothers Shylock refused to pay me."

Her eyes twinkled. "You are not mean enough to claim it. Be merciful!"

"It is not so nominated in the bond," I replied.

"Well, anyhow, half of it comes to me."

"Oh, dear no ; these are not author's royalties, of which you are entitled to half, but this was a side gamble, and I have won."

Well, they had to grin and pay this extra 20% on all over £1,500 a week, for week after week, for five years. As it also applied in a lesser way to American and provincial royalties, it turned out a very profitable arrangement for me. I must have drawn well over £200,000 in royalties from *Chu*. And everyone connected with *Chu* made a fortune. Some kept it. I didn't.

When dear old Tree came back from America, after we had been running to huge business for several months, he was very upset about it, and though he had always been most kind and friendly with us, he turned quite crusty, and would scarcely notice us. It annoyed him to know that we had made a record success at his theatre, even though it meant a profit of hundreds a week to him. How different it was when he returned from America in the summer of 1917 ! The film people in America had treated him abominably and with discourtesy, and he was glad to be home. Then came the accident which was the cause of his death.

Some days before his death I was sitting with him and Lady Tree by his bedside in the nursing-home. He was his old cheery, witty self. "Keep *Chu Chin Chow* going, Asche, as long as it will. If your dear wife will put up more money to re-dress it or alter it, as you may think best, I will provide an equal sum. I have never had a *Chu Chin Chow* myself."

Then he laughed. "Someone asked me at the Club (the Garrick) the other night my opinion of *Chu Chin Chow*. I replied I considered it more naval than millinery."

Another day I was sitting with him, when he suddenly said: "Asche, you can have my theatre for £90,000." I said something about not having that amount handy. "You can easily raise it on the name of His Majesty's Theatre and *Chu Chin Chow*," he replied. I reminded him that he, with all his experience, had found it difficult to keep that theatre going. "It is easier," I told him, "to find another theatre for a *Chu Chin Chow* than to find another *Chu Chin Chow* for His Majesty's Theatre." Which is true, I think.

It came as a terrible shock to us all, the news of his death. Why he should have died from such a simple accident, and after such a simple operation, has always remained a puzzle. Even in those days of countless deaths, his left a great gap.

During the air raids the performance was often interrupted. I remember one night I had just made my first entrance, singing: "I am Chu Chin Chow of China", when I saw the white handkerchief waved from the prompt corner, a signal that the Field-Marshal's warning had come through. So I stopped and passed the message on to the audience, who retired into the corridors and rang the iron curtain down. As soon as the "All Clear" came, we started again, only to be stopped at the same spot by the waving of the handkerchief. Again we stopped, and again we started, and again we stopped at the same identical spot.

When, eventually, we started again, it was nearly 10 p.m., so, as it was impossible to do the entire play, I asked the audience to vote what scenes we should play. And so we played accordingly.

It was always difficult to restrain the girls, during an air raid, from rushing into the street, to pick up shrapnel as souvenirs. When I had put a commissionaire at the stage-door to stop them, they all disappeared one night and watched the bombing and fighting from the roof.

We were all a very happy big family those five years of *Chu*. Quite a lot of humorous incidents were connected with *Chu*. A foreign producer of revues, on the first night, prophesied a run of six weeks. Another wrote me advising another title. "No one," wrote he, "will ever remember *Chu Chin Chow*." One of the camels



AS JOHN BULL IN CHU CHIN CHOW ARMISTICE NIGHT,
NOVEMBER 11TH, 1918

(Facing page 164)

fell through the glass light in the pavement into the alley-way below, and was killed. The following day the man who looked after the animals said to me : "Do you ever go to the Soho restaurants ?" I replied I did at times. "Well, guv'nor, don't go for the next few days. I sold Nellie (the camel) to them, and she's a bit ancient." I took his advice.

People came over and over again to *Chu*. A Lancashire family booked the same eight stalls on the first Tuesday of every month, from November, 1916, until we finished in 1921. Lord Dewar brought the late Walter Wynans to my dressing-room one night, and told me that he (Wynans) had seen *Chu* seventy-five times. And he was there two or three nights before he died. I shall never forget Armistice Night. When the maroons went off at 11 a.m. I was at the stage door of His Majesty's Theatre, and was watching, a few minutes later, the great excitement raging down the Haymarket. A General came out of the post office in Charles Street and crossed over and stood beside us, watching also. And then he said : "If they only knew that by this armistice we have lost the War—" But we did not know it at the time.

We decided, besides decorating the auditorium with flags and bunting, to have something special on the stage. It was all thought out, the dresses made, and rehearsed before the evening. After the last set of mannequins had gone off, the strains of the Belgian national anthem were heard, and a girl entered dressed in the Belgian colours, bearing the Belgian flag. Then followed France, Italy, Portugal, Japan, Roumania, Greece, America ; and at the end Lil came on as Britannia, with trident and a white dove in her hand. She was accompanied by Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Ceylon, India, Newfoundland, Canada, etc., to the strains of "Rule Britannia." And then she threw off the white dove of peace. It fluttered round the auditorium, returned to the stage and rested on the draperies of France. This unrehearsed happy effect created the wildest of enthusiasm. So popular was it all that we kept in the Allies for six months. At the end of the performance I came on, dressed as John Bull, and made a speech—what about I cannot remember. It was a very joyous night. But I often recall that General's words as the maroons went off.

Chu Chin Chow went merrily on and on. After Tree's death the theatre was sold to Mr. Joseph Benson for £105,000, £15,000 more than Tree had offered it to me for. Messrs. Laurillard and Grossmith took a lease of it, and reports and rumours had it that *Chu* was finishing and that one of their musical shows was going to take its place. I had these rumours and reports repeated to me on my return from a holiday. No steps had been taken to contradict them, so I had posters printed to this effect :

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

Notice.

The Sale of this Theatre
in no way affects
the Run of

CHU CHIN CHOW

Which will remain
at this theatre during the pleasure
of

His Majesty's Theatre's Public.

Before the End

Messrs. Laurillard & Grossmith
may find themselves in a far,
far better land.

There is always hope.

This may not be the exact wording, but something like it. These were posted all round the theatre and killed the rumour more effectually than any contradiction in the Press.

It was during the run of *Chu* that Mr. Joseph Langton died. It was terribly sudden. I was just leaving my dressing-room to go on the stage, one matinée, as he passed my door to go up in the lift to his room. "Hello! how are you?" I called. "Oh, all right," he replied. "Well, I shall be seeing you in two minutes after this act"—for I had an appointment with him. After the curtain fell I took the lift up to his floor, to be met with the news: "Mr. Langton is dead." It was too true. He was lying on the floor, dead. And by his death many, many people—myself among the number—lost a very good friend.

He was at the time of his death manager of the theatre for the Tree estate, and he was also an executor.

Although the theatre-going public knew him not, I felt that with his body lying there it would be not quite nice to continue playing the matinée. So I took it upon myself to finish the performance and let the audience know the reason, and return their money. And for so doing I got well rapped over the knuckles. If I had continued to show I should have been called callous and mercenary by the same people, as I had been in Australia on the occasion of my mother's death. I think there was a vast difference in the two happenings. But you can never do the right thing and please everybody.

Nothing seemed to affect *Chu*. It went merrily on, through war, through peace, police strikes, everything. But it got terribly boring going down those stairs night after night to go through the same old lines. But the performance was never allowed to get slack nor the scenery nor costumes shabby. The scenery was touched up every week, and the dresses were always kept fresh, and new ones

continually being added. Sarah the donkey used to kick up her heels at times and misbehave. The first time she did so she ran into the middle of Piccadilly Circus and began kicking at the traffic. She was arrested and taken to Vine Street. Here they petted her, giving her bread and things to eat. They rang us up to know if we were short of a donkey. We sent up and bailed her out. Now ever after that, whenever she became temperamental, she would slip her halter, run to Piccadilly, play Old Harry with the traffic, and as soon as she saw a policeman approach, off she would scamper to Vine Street. They got to know all about her and made a great pet of her. The inspector in charge would just ring up the stage-door and phone "Sarah's here again". From time to time we had all kinds of animals on. A sacred bullock, camels, monkeys, a fat-tailed sheep, poultry, snakes, a horse, donkeys!

I shall never forget the consternation and surprise when the notice went up stating that *Chu* was finishing its run in a month's time. We had struck a patch of warm weather about June, and the receipts for two weeks in succession fell below a certain figure. So up went the notice. I honestly believe it would have run another two years. Anyhow, members of the public wrote most indignant letters about it coming off. It had become an institution. In some quarters *Chu* was scoffed at, through envy or jealousy or pique. And because it was an all-British production that was sufficient to damn it in the opinion of some critics. But old *Chu* had an answer to all his detractors, and that was "Look at my record. Can you, will you ever beat it? 2,235 performances! Nearly a year longer than the Great War!" As soon as the last four weeks were announced there was a rush, and we ended up in a blaze of glory. The last house, 22nd July 1921, was our record of the run—£503 8s. od. at raised prices. Everyone had tears in their eyes this last night. We had been a happy family for five years, including the month's preliminary rehearsals. There was one pathetic incident on this last night. A dear old lady came to my room to see me. She had written asking me to see her. She had been in front the last night. "I am sorry it is finished," she said. "It has been a link with me and my boy. He was killed just before the Armistice. He was with me in front on the opening night, in 1916, and on every leave we always paid *Chu* a visit. After his death I have booked two stalls on the anniversary of those leaves. I occupied one seat and my boy's cap was on the other. And it was with me to-night." And she held in her hand an old school-cap. Well *Chu* was over for the present. It had been a fortnight's work on my part. It was an accident that I met Frederick Norton. It established his name. And in solid cash something between £3,000,000 and £3,500,000 has been paid by the public to see it. As I have stated, I must have drawn £200,000 out

of its success. The film rights were sold for £8,000, although a few days later an offer of £12,000 was made. The "Robbers of the Woods" March was played as the British troops crossed over the Rhine, and "Any time's Kissing-time" and the "Cobbler's Song" are sung all over the world. What answer have ye to that, ye knockers and grouzers ?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"*The Maid of the Mountains*"—"The Southern Maid"—"*Cairo*"

DURING the run of *Chu* I produced for the George Edwardes Estate, at the invitation of Robert Evett, *The Maid of the Mountains*. It came about in this manner.

I had not seen Bobbie for some years, with the exception of the one day he told me *Chu Chin Chow* was no good. We used to play a great deal of cricket together in the old days, sometimes on the same side, sometimes on opposite sides. One morning he sent me word he wanted to see me. I went along. He was in his room at Daly's. Then he told me briefly that the Edwardes Estate, or the Daly's Theatre, was overdrawn at the Bank, that people were wanting to buy the theatre and they, the Edwardes family, must have a success. He had a play, a musical play. Book by Freddie Lonsdale, music by Fraser Simpson. Would I produce it for him? I asked for the book, to read it first. It was called *Teresa*. I read it and said I would produce it, but suggested several alterations. Bobbie said Lonsdale would do anything. That, of course, was before his great successes as an author of straight plays. Evett asked me what fee I wanted, asking me to be lenient. I named a certain sum, which was accepted. The first thing I suggested was to change the title. I christened it *The Maid of the Mountains*. And so it was. The first scene in the original was the exterior of a hut. I made it the exterior of the huts of the bandits, with a stockade behind which were great mountains and a pass, and between the actors and the audience a yawning chasm about 12 feet wide. I had the stage cut away really to keep the artistes from walking right down to the footlights and singing direct to the audience. They did not realize this at first. The rehearsals were very jolly. José Collins was at her wonderful best, and she and I only had one row during the rehearsals of this and the succeeding play. In the Second Act I so arranged the scene that there were two big lily-ponds in the foreground, leaving only a small space in the centre for the artistes to tread upon the footlights. In the last Act, being the sea-shore, I had a cartload of sharp, shingly sand, reaching from the footlights to a respectable distance up-stage. As most of the fish-folk were barefooted, they fought shy of walking on the sand, and

even for those with boots on the uneven sand was not too comfy to walk upon. In this way I managed, for the first night, at any rate, and for some considerable time afterwards, to keep that footlight-treading disease at a distance. *The Maid of the Mountains* ran for three years, establishing a record for a musical comedy. So as producer I had two long-run records.

I must tell a funny story about Bobbie Evett. He asked me out to supper one night after the show, and José looked in. I think they had had some slight argument connected with the play. Anyhow, Bobbie was sulky and would not have any supper. So he sat some little distance away, but within arm's reach of the chicken. I was asked to carve. José had already supped and had just looked in on her way home to bed. The conversation was between José and me. Now there were some French rolls on the table, a large pat of butter, ham, and slices of the chicken I had carved. I was eating in solitary state. Presently I noticed Bobby reach across, take a roll, split it open with a knife, lard it well with butter, and then make a sandwich of it with a large piece of ham. This he made short work of, and reached soon for another. This time he varied the sandwich with a slice of chicken. He had taken one large bite out of this, when José broke off the conversation and said: "Bobbie, I think it's *extremely* rude of you to ask Oscar to supper, and then not to sit down and join him." "Extremely" was not exactly the adjective she used, but it meant the same. "Supper!" exploded Bobbie. "Supper!" and he gesticulated with the French roll sandwich, which was now a half-moon shape. "Good—! woman, how can a man eat when he's upset!" Then they both rounded on me for laughing.

The Maid of the Mountains was, as I have already stated, a big success, and Evett asked me to produce the next play at Daly's, *The Southern Maid*, by Dion Calthrop and Harry Graham, music by Fraser Simpson. When the play was read to me, I suggested several alterations, which were duly carried out, including the insertion of a new character, Francesco del Fuego, a kind of Pistol part. This turned out to be the principal male part in the play and was superbly acted by Bertram Wallace, an entirely new line of part for him. This was also a great success and ran about a year. It would have had a much longer run had not quarrels and bad temper interfered with it. It was just before the production of this that I first met the late Jimmy White, who had about this time taken over the theatre. It was obvious to any observer that he was a meglomaniac, and though it caused him at times to be most amusing, the signpost always pointed one way. Bobbie Evett was very bucked with the success of *The Maid of the Mountains*, and engaged in friendly rivalry with me in advertising it against *Chu Chin Chow*. After I had advertised extra matinées during Christmas and New Year weeks,

some three months in advance, he advertised the same, and also extra matinées during next Easter. I replied with the announcement that following our usual custom for some years past, extra matinées would be given every Christmas and New Year and Easter weeks until further notice. He advertised :

THE MAID OF THE MOUNTAINS

The longest Run of any
Musical Play in
this
or any other theatre.

I followed with :

CHU CHIN CHOW

The longest Run of
any Play
In this or any other theatre,
In this or any other country,
In this or any other century.

I have mentioned about my dresser, who was a bit of a character, and also a cross between Dogberry and Mrs. Malaprop. During *Chu* he was, on more than one occasion, the provider of a good story. One night, on entering my dressing-room, he closed the door. "I want to ask you a question of some *delicy*," he started. "Yes, what is it?" "I don't now whether you're acquainted with the law. I'm rather *vogue* about it myself. But what I want to ask you is this: My wife ran away from me fourteen years and eight months ago to-night. She ran off with my lodger. Since then I've reason to believe she has married a publican and has three children by him. Now what I want to ask is this: 'Ave I sufficient grounds for divorce, or must I do something *abnormal* myself?" What he meant, no one ever guessed. Another one, and one Charlie Pounds used to vouch for as true, as it was uttered in his presence. I was talking to Charlie Pounds about Lil, who that day had undergone some slight operation, and I was naturally a bit worried. My man came in with some drinks we had ordered. And he started. "Oh, cheer up, sir," said he; "operations do good sometimes. I 'ad a lady friend once, a friend of the family's. She 'ad terrible pains inside, you know, sort of intravelling pains, like women 'ave when they're going to be confirmed. She thought it was some trouble with 'er aviaries so she went to a surgeon. 'E dogmatized her case correctly, removed 'er appentages, and *she's* all right *now*!" An amusing fellow, and for seventeen years a faithful servant.

During the run of *Chu* I had written another Oriental story.

I called it *Mecca*. It was not taken from any of the Arabian Nights tales. I wrote all the lyrics as well, and Percy Fletcher composed the music. I sold this to Morris Gest for America for £1,000 premium and £1,000 down on account of 10% royalties. Morris Gest had bought and presented *Chu Chin Chow* in America. Both plays were produced by Lyall Swete, carrying out all my directions. Both plays played to tremendous money. Then I sold the Australian rights to Hugh D. Mackintosh, who forfeited them. It had been arranged that *Mecca* should succeed *Chu* at His Majesty's Theatre. This time the syndicate consisted of Grossmith and Malone on one side and Lil and myself on the other. We each put up £5,000, making a total of £20,000. We struck trouble from the first. All the music had been published and the posters printed, when suddenly a bombshell was dropped by the Lord Chamberlain's office. We must not use the title *Mecca*. It would give offence to so many millions of our subjects. Stuff and nonsense! The whole thing was engineered by a certain well-known Egyptologist, who was annoyed at the success of *Chu Chin Chow* after I had turned down an Oriental play of his. Anyhow, he started the ball rolling. It was no use pointing out that *Mecca* was a household word. One heard and read of London being the Mecca of actors, artists, Americans, etc. Then there were Mecca Cafés and Mecca coffee and cigarettes. And on Derby day at Epsom a doctor, a stranger to me, handed me a circular he had received that morning. "Asche, send this to the Lord Chamberlain." And I read: "Mecca Ointment, a sure cure for piles." In spite of all, however, I had to change the name, and chose *Cairo*, which meant nothing. All the music had to be reprinted, and the posters also. Having put everything in hand, scenery by Harker, costumes by B. J. Simmons, from Percy Anderson's designs, Lil and I took a holiday before starting rehearsals, going on the R.M.S.P. *Avon* for a voyage to the Norwegian fjords. During our stay at Bergen, I called at the National Theatre and had a chat with the director, and afterwards lunch with an old friend of mine, now the English Consul in Bergen. We had a pleasant trip and then, after a fortnight at Duff House, Banff, where I took off a couple of stone in weight, we started rehearsals.

Cairo was the heaviest and most elaborate production ever put upon the English stage. Yet we produced it in under four weeks, and had not to try it out in the country first, as is the fashion nowadays. And my longest rehearsal was seven hours. The modern producer takes about six weeks, especially if he is an American, and has anything up to twenty-hour rehearsals, has to take the show into the country for a few weeks, before he dare show it in London. Why? Because he does not know his business. Irving never had to try out his productions, nor did Tree, nor did I, and, without

throwing any roses at myself, I have produced more spectacular shows than anyone. Four weeks has always been my limit. On this occasion, on Wednesday before the week of production, I told the members of the company that they could all go away and take holiday until 11 a.m. the following Monday, producing the Saturday of that week. Pat Malone, Carl Leyel, our manager, and Lil all protested, but as producer I was boss. I was perfectly satisfied with their work. A rest would do them good, and they would come back fresh. They all argued, but off the company went. I had lots to attend to in the theatre connected with the scenery. On Friday morning I discovered that a certain novelty I was introducing into *Cairo* had, as in *Chu*, leaked out, and was going to be done elsewhere before my production. I could not advance the date of *Cairo*, as had been done with *Chu*, because of the holiday I had given to the members of the company, who were scattered about goodness knew where. Anyhow, I was determined not to be done. It cost me a little money, but on the Monday the gentleman who had stolen my idea found his copy of it all beautifully smashed up beyond repair within the time that remained before production. So, after all, I got in first, but not without more trouble from the Lord Chamberlain's office. After our final dress rehearsal we were notified that the two large bronze gates which opened outwards to disclose the inset scenes must be altered. They crossed the line of the safety-curtain in their opening by one half-inch. The gentlemen who represented the engineering department came to the theatre and I gave them a demonstration. Now the gates did pass over the safety curtain line by half an inch, and took less than $1/5$ th of a second in doing so. The gentlemen's own timing. The gates were opened and shut by hand-power, so no mechanism could go wrong. The safety-curtain took ten seconds to descend from its highest point to the top of the gates. It's rather difficult to explain. Anyhow, both gentlemen admitted that there was no element of danger in case of fire. But—oh, those red-tape "buts"—the gates did certainly go over the safety-line by half an inch, and must be altered. This necessitated something like twelve hours' work at the last moment.

Cairo was received with even more enthusiasm than *Chu*. And we played to capacity-houses month after month. The house held exactly one hundred pounds more per night than formerly, owing to the prices being raised from pre-War to those ruling at other theatres. The Egyptian orgy aroused a considerable amount of controversy. It was daring, but not more so than the Russian Ballet—but that of course, being foreign, is forgiven anything. To be really a great success with a certain section of the public and Press, one must be a Persian Pole, a Russian Rumanian, or some other alien of obscure nationality, with some unpronounceable

name, a certain amount of oiliness, and a certain amount of—smell. One critic likened the picture of the dancers, lying about the stage in deep slumber, in the cold light of dawn, the morning after the orgy, to a shoal of mackerel cast up on a beach in moonlight—and about as beautiful. He meant it “sarcastic”. I have seen a haul of mackerel drawn ashore, but never in moonlight, and a most beautiful sight it was. Moonlight would add to the beauty. Probably the gentleman had never seen more than a string of bloaters on a fish-stall.

Cairo ran about nine months, and was taken off for reasons in no way connected with its failure to attract. It has more than once been stated in the Press that it was a financial failure. As a matter of fact and figures, *Cairo*, from first to last, resulted in a profit of £12,000. I should like to have a lot of financial failures like that.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

My Third Voyage to Australia—The Chances of the Immigrant— A Corrupt Government—The Yellow Peril

SHORTLY after the end of our season at His Majesty's Theatre, which we had occupied for nearly six years, I received a very tempting offer to make another visit to Australia and present there the London production of *Cairo*. This I accepted, and together with six or seven members of the company, we sailed from Tilbury on the Orient liner *Ormuz*, 22nd July 1922. She was an old German barge of a boat. Her former name, I think, was *Zeppelin*. A good boat in a sea, for she just barged her way through. But her appointments were shoddy. And I think there were only two bathrooms for the first-class passengers. It did not affect me, as I had a cabin *de luxe*, with bathroom attached, all to myself. The same old ports as before, but always interesting. Port Said even more respectable than ten years before. But still the filthy-looking meat hanging up in the butchers' stalls covered with flies. And still the miserable-looking children, with their eyelashes fringed with flies.

Pussyfoot Johnson was a fellow passenger. He was quite a sport, and did not mind being chipped about Prohibition. At Gib. he went ashore like the rest of us, and bought several boxes of most vile cigars. Coming back in the tender, he happened to be standing against a background of stone jars of spirits and wine, and holding his poisonous boxes of stinkers in his arms. One of us, unknown to him, tied labels round these bottles with his name plainly written on them. I took a photo of him, and he was most amused. Then he insisted on a photograph being taken of him and myself indulging in a cup of cocoa.

Arrived at Colombo, I invited the members of the company to be my guests for the day. We were met on landing by a couple of cars which the purser had wirelessly for, and in these we drove to the Galle-Face for early-morning coffee. Then we motored all through the bazaars to the Cinnamon garden, eventually landing at Mount Lavinia, where we had the usual curried prawns, and other Cingalese dishes. The usual junk was bought, and so back to the *Ormuz*. At Fremantle some of us had a game of golf on not very

good links. We arrived at our destination, Sydney, towards the end of August, with a fortnight to rehearse before opening. My stage-manager had preceded me by a fortnight. All my people were now dead, except my stepbrother, Jack; and he died not long after my arrival. My younger brother, Fritz, had been killed in the Great War whilst serving with one of the Queensland contingents. So I had no family left to make a fuss over me. I lived alone, with my valet, my cabin steward from the *Ormuz*. It was all very lonely. But the people were hospitable as ever, especially the Hon. Hugh D. Mackintosh. He gave a big supper-party to me the night of our opening with *Cairo*, which had been received with most excited enthusiasm. I had made good once more and we played to enormous business. But from the first things began to go wrong. I had no manager to look after my affairs and interest. I had a most wonderful contract drawn up by my solicitors in London, but before the end of the tour every clause of that contract had been broken. That is only a statement of fact, and not denied.

After playing to eight weeks' enormous business, it was decided to shift us to Melbourne as a counterblast to the opening there by a new rival firm, the Hugh J. Ward Properties Ltd. We could have, and should have, played another ten or twelve weeks in Sydney, but we were being used as propaganda, and although I was to receive 50% of the profits of the tour, my interests were naturally not taken into account. We played *Cairo* ten weeks in all in Sydney, and for our last ten days there I put on a big production, with an entirely novel setting, of *Julius Cæsar*. For the first two nights, this hung fire. But when the news spread that it was something absolutely new in the way of production, backed up by wonderful Press notices, there was a rush, and we played to full houses.

My tour of Australia was a repetition of the two previous tours, except that the business done was even greater. I am not going to deal with the tour in detail. Besides *Cairo*, I produced *Chu Chin Chow*, which, though it had already been played there, had lacked the atmosphere of the original. A copy is always a copy. I also played *Othello* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, old favourites, and Pinero's *Iris*, *The Spanish Main*, and, to end up with, Galsworthy's *The Skin Game*. In all the tour lasted eighty weeks. The receipts averaged about £2,600 a week.

During my first season in Sydney I accepted an invitation from Hugh D. Mackintosh to make one of a motor-party to Jervis Bay. We started after the play was over on Saturday night. It was a very rough journey and it was well on into the morning before we arrived at the one and only building either in or on the outskirts of Pacific City, a beautifully-laid-out city—in imagination. All the avenues and streets are named, and there are kerbstones at each

corner. Nothing more. We had a few hours in bed, and an early breakfast, and then motored on a few miles to Jervis Bay. Here I thought I recognized the white sands and turquoise sea of so many years ago. But I dare say there are similar sands and seas on this coast. Certainly it was not near the spot of my cave. I only wish I had had the time to try and find the old spot. It could not have been far away, as I recognized the similarity of the surrounding country. It was somewhere on the coast between Berry and Cape Howe. And Nowra may have been the township I shopped at. But it was thirty-four or more years ago, and things change in that time. Jervis Bay is not far from that white elephant of Australia, Canberra. Near-by is a naval college. Hugh D. Mac told me how many rooms it contained and how many tennis-courts there were. He said he had often thought what a wonderful seaside hotel it would make. At that time, I believe, there were only a few students there. We had a wonderful bathe, and week-end. But I wonder when Pacific City will be populated, and from where? Canberra is, of course, the result of inter-state jealousy, as so many other follies in Australia are traceable to the same thing. For instance, the difference of the railway gauges. This was of set purpose between Melbourne and Sydney, in case of inter-colonial war between New South Wales and Victoria, so that the rolling-stock of one colony could not be utilized by its opponent. Of course, in those days, when they were called colonies, they were very young. Such silliness might be expected from children, but not from grown-up people. Though not so acute as formerly, this jealousy still exists and pervades everything. When Lord Kitchener visited Australia, either in 1912 or 1913—I know it was when we were playing *Count Hannibal*, for he paid the theatre a visit and came round to the stage afterwards—he naturally put his finger on this weak spot, advising the unification of gauge throughout Australia. Not only from a military but from an industrial standpoint the variation of gauge throughout the country is a great drawback. At that time it was reckoned the cost would have been £60,000,000. Did the Government act on his advice? Not a bit of it. Perhaps there was no money to be grafted out of it. But they built Canberra as the capital of the Commonwealth, on a site miles and miles from any existing railhead, but with many square miles of land which could be bought, and were bought, by speculators who had forehand knowledge. For some miles round the site itself the land was reserved for the Commonwealth, but adjacent land was bought and some time ago was being sold to mugs in England at £60 a lot, and worth a few shillings. Australia has always suffered from over-government, and bad government at that. Only a few men of the right type, like Mr. Stanley Bruce, have been attracted by Parliamentary life and honest

duty to their country. All kinds of clap-trap adventurers have made it a means of livelihood. What Canberra has cost, and will yet cost, would have paid for all Lord Kitchener advised.

Then there is the transcontinental railway connecting Adelaide with Fremantle. I forget how many times one has to change trains on the trip on account of the difference in gauge. But the line across the desert in one place runs for 800 miles without a curve, with stations at regular intervals for watering the engine. And all this water has to be brought by rail. To the horizon on both sides of the train is a kind of low-growing saltbush. No sign of life except an occasional wild turkey did I see on my trip across. Yet the rabbit travelled across these thousands of miles and climbed over the rabbit-proof fence which runs for thousands of miles from north to south, erected to guard Western Australia from the pest. I was told the Government lose £1,000 on every journey of this train. It is a most tedious and uncomfortable journey. At certain times of the year everything is covered with sand—your clothes, your food. It gets into your mouth, your eyes, your nose, your ears. Everything that the Australian Government have managed has been a dire failure. The Government trawlers and the Commonwealth Line of steamers for two. This is the more extraordinary, as private enterprises and organizations flourish exceedingly. For instance, racing in Australia is an object-lesson to the world. No finer race-courses exist than Flemington and Randwick. Everything is done to make the public comfortable. Ten shillings and sixpence is the highest price. You sit on seats as comfortable as at most theatres, the luncheon-rooms are spacious and the food of excellent quality and cheap. There are oyster-bars, tea-rooms, beautiful lawns, good bands and a perfect view of every race from start to finish. The last word in organization. The same with their cricket-grounds. The spectator is made comfortable and the state of the game can be seen at any moment by a glance at the score-board. There are no cards sold at twopence each. Everything connected with sport and run by private enterprise is a success of good management and clever brains. The Government make a fiasco of everything. Now a bridge costing something like £6,000,000 is being thrown across the harbour from Sydney to North shore. This will not bring into the country one penny more from abroad. It is of no industrial value. Merely a residential luxury. Naturally the price of land for building purposes, and on which buildings already stood, jumped up in value as soon as the decision of the Government was made. And quite nice little lumps of money were made by those who had the tip to buy before and sell after. What is easier? Real estate makes the fortune of many people out there who are in the swim. A scheme is proposed by which certain property will be greatly enhanced in value, whether it be a

branch railway, or irrigation schemes, or the building of a bridge. When the proposition has been materialized it is discovered that all adjacent land and property has been bought up by someone with an uncanny scent of future events. Now, take immigration. It is very long odds against any immigrant making good. I am only repeating now what I said at a luncheon at which I was invited to speak in 1922. I was rapped over the knuckles for it, but I still stick to my opinion. I dare say I have travelled about the Australian country as much as many, and more than most, Australians. In 1912 and 1913, and again in 1922, 1923 and 1924, I motored thousands and thousands of miles in every direction in my own cars, especially in New South Wales and Victoria, and I met many immigrants, but never one who was satisfied with his lot. After the War thousands of returned Australians went on the land, assisted by the Government, as poultry-farmers and fruit-growers. When I was there in 1923, the papers were full of accusations against the Government for their treatment of these men, because they would advance them no further money. The men, especially the poultry-farmers, were practically all bankrupt and were about to lose their holdings. Now if the Australian soldier could not make both ends meet, how can the inexperienced English immigrant do so? At the same time, on another page, someone would be urging immigration on a bigger scale. And, moreover, the English immigrant is not wanted by the Australian worker. There was a paper in Melbourne at that time that had opened its columns to correspondence on the subject of the immigrant. Every day bitter letters of vituperation and recrimination appeared from Englishmen and Australians. And many were the pitiful stories of how immigrants had come under promise of work, with so-called guarantees by the Government, only to be stranded. The so-called Government guarantee had no signature of any member of the Government attached. Only during the past week I heard of a case of a young man and his wife, who had put their savings into farming, so keen were they, and for some time their relations over here have been helping them. Now they have sent an S.O.S. cable. They have lost everything, and are being turned out into the streets, or rather roads, and asking for money to be cabled for their steerage passage home. And when I was playing in Perth, a Gloucester woman who knew that I had a farm in the Cotswolds came round to see me. And she told me her tale. She and her husband, both under thirty, had gone out with a capital of £300. The Government put them on a selection. They lived in a corrugated-iron hut, and not only were *they* in tin, but so was most of their food. They had to work hard to clear the ground of timber. The nearest neighbours were ten miles away and the nearest township where there was a doctor was twenty. Every week the husband rode in

for provisions, all tinned. A baby was born, without a doctor or anyone near to help. The mother was weak and badly nourished, and the baby died. Then at last their money was almost at an end, with no possibility of any income or provision from their land, so they chucked it and were returning to Gloucester, third-class, on an Orient liner. "And when I get home," said the woman bitterly, "I'll tell any woman who wants to do any pioneering out here, that she would be much more comfortable and much better off doing three years penal in an English prison."

And another case, of an experienced young farmer close to my farm, who went out. He came to see me, and I strongly advised him not to go, but he was carried away by the wonderful tales he had been told, and he had a goodly sum of money. He was going out, and then sending for his wife. And he went on the land not far from wonderful Canberra. In two years he was back again, having lost all, but chockfull of disillusion. That was between August, 1924, and Christmas, 1927. He is now working on his father's farm.

I can also take the case of my young brother. He was young, strong, a good athlete, and complete horseman. A horseman, as distinguished from a mere rider. He had lived most of his life in the bush. He had years of experience with sheep and cattle and agriculture. My mother started him on his own, bought the land and two teams of plough-horses, eight in all, and all the implements, etc., he needed. And he had a first-class housekeeper, who had brought him up, to look after him. And yet, though he worked hard, owing to adverse seasons and drought, he lost everything, and had to return to sheep-shearing. After serving through the Boer War, he was killed in France.

You may ask why am I going out of my way to decry my native country as an immigration dump. I believe that there is room for several millions more people in Australia, when the Government of Australia and the English Government have made the country ready for them. The country can never carry the forty or fifty millions that some writers so glibly talk and write about. It never was able to sustain a big aborigine population, and that is always a test. America swarmed with Red Indians. Now it swarms with something else. But Australia only had nomadic tribes that followed the rains. It's all very well to talk about the pioneers in the early days of Australia and the great wealth they acquired. But things were very different then. Something akin to some of the English landed aristocracy who came over with William the Conqueror. They simply stole their land, or won it by conquest, and this land has passed down from father to son for hundreds of years. The old pioneers in Australia got their properties in very similar fashion. They just rode out into virgin country, chose a nice piece of so many square miles, and

squatted down on it. By so doing it became theirs and they were *squatters*. If the blackfellows, as they are wrongly named, being far from black, disputed with them or attacked them, the blackfellows were driven away or shot. But they had more right, surely, to the land. Then, having stolen their property by right of conquest, the poor blackfellow was gradually exterminated by the aid of blankets, the Bible and alcohol. Therefore, many years ago, all the best land was taken up, and what is left is sold by the Government at exorbitant prices to settlers. What Australia wants is capital. And big capital. Not a loan of five or ten millions. But a hundred millions at least, for irrigation on a big scale, the making of roads from inland to seaboard, and for the unification of the railway gauges. This would provide useful and productive work for the great number of unemployed in Australia and for unemployed from home. For there are crowds of unemployed in Australia, many of them English soldiers enticed out to Australia by promises of work, and after their "landing money" of £3 had gone, left stranded. That was the story told me by a lady, Major Booth, who was in command of the hostel for soldiers in Sydney, originally the Royal Hotel, George Street.

Do not misunderstand me. Australia is a wonderful country, and the Australians are a fine, frank, liberty-loving people; but it is not the El Dorado it is advertised as being for those who cannot find work in England.

Take the growth of population. When I was at school, over forty years ago, the population of Australia was about 5,000,000. It is now a little over 6,000,000. An increase of only a little more than a million in forty years. But forty years ago the population of Sydney was about 500,000, and Melbourne about 450,000. Now Sydney has 1,090,000 and Melbourne 950,000, so that the total increase of Australia has been absorbed by these two cities. In addition, Brisbane has a population of 275,000, Adelaide 317,000, and Perth 184,000. And these three have doubled their population in forty years. Nearly half the population live in the five capitals of the Commonwealth. That does not speak well for the attractions of life in the country districts. For if the whole population of Australia has increased by 1,200,000, and the population of the five principal cities has increased by 1,400,000 (and these are Government figures), to say nothing about other big towns, such as Geelong, Bendigo, Ballarat, Newcastle, etc., the rural population must have decreased. Of course, with the introduction of wire fences, rabbit-proof fences, and machinery of every description, the need for manpower in the country is rapidly decreasing. Australia is essentially in the main a sheep country. And sheep is no good to the small man. Most of the big sheep stations are now owned by companies with a

paid manager, and it is surprising how few hands are employed to do the work on a really big property running scores of thousands of sheep. An immigrant arriving in Australia to-day must have a certain amount of capital, five or six hundred pounds at least. If he be well-advised he will accept a job with some farmer or squatter and learn by experience what is required. But, above all, he must not let anyone know he has any capital, or they will have it out of him. Then, when he considers himself fit to take up and work land, he will be better able to gauge its value. He must remember this: The Government has little land of any value to sell, and it charges exorbitant prices for it. The Government welcomes the immigrant with a few hundred pounds. For it takes care these few hundred pounds remain in the country. It is no concern of theirs what becomes of the poor immigrant. They will treat him more harshly than any Jew moneylender, and when they have got all your money and your improvements on the land, they chuck you out, stranded, 1,300 miles away from those who might help you. But if the immigrant has sufficient capital to be independent of the Government, he may in twenty years make his property a paying concern for his son. Now, since writing the above, I have just had several hours' conversation with an English officer, a Colonel, who has been in Australia for four years since I left it in 1924. He does not know Sydney or Melbourne. He was in Canberra and surrounding districts. He confirmed what I have already stated that Canberra is a wash-out. No Australian of any intelligence, he said, will say otherwise. He liked the country and the people, but it was his experience also that an English immigrant to-day has not a 500-to-1 chance of making good. I asked him about Pacific City near Jervis Bay, which in 1922 I visited, the city laid out on paper with all its avenues and streets named by signposts. There was a large painted board: "Pacific City, Watch it Grow!" The colonel told me, and Fred Terry was present, that when he saw it last in 1928 the only thing that had grown was the *scrub*. Not a brick, not a weatherboard cottage even. This is the land that was bought up by people who knew beforehand the Government intention. The land is valueless. The colonel told me that the Naval College which I have mentioned at Jervis Bay now turns out about 20 cadets a year. All this is free to the boys and boys' parents. The taxpayer foots the bill. Now that the Federal Government is obliged to sit, and therefore for the time of sitting live at Canberra, there is every likelihood of it attracting only those who are out for graft, because the man who has a profession and still practises, or the man with other work to do to earn his living, could not possibly carry on living at such an out-of-the-way place. Therefore only those who enter parliamentary life for what they can make out of it, or the independent millionaire, will



As "OTHELLO"

[Photograph by Histed

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be able to afford the luxury of doing their duty—or doing their country.

Where irrigation from the rivers Murrinbridge or Murray has been carried out, the land so irrigated is mostly orchards, and wonderful fruit is grown, but there is no market to pay the grower. Ninety per cent. of the price paid sticks to the middleman and the transport. And irrigation is what Australia needs. Irrigation on a vast scale if the land is to be productive in the now waterless districts.

Artesian wells are only good for stock to drink. This water, which seems everlasting, gushes up from 800 feet to 2,000 feet or more to the surface. It is boiling hot and impregnated with various chemicals. Stock lap it greedily, even when hot. And for the first year or two, the land irrigated thereby grows fine crops of grass, but then owing to the chemicals goes sour and is useless. So that any irrigation for improvement of the land must be from the rivers. And there is only one river of any pretension in Australia—the Murray. The Murrinbridge, the Darling or Barwen are tributaries of the river Murray, which empties itself into the sea near Adelaide.

Up north, Queensland way, what is needed is coloured labour. "White Australia", by all means, if practicable, but is it? You cannot grow sugar and cotton economically with white labour. Donkey work should be carried out by donkeys. When the late Lord Leverhulme was out there a few years ago he pointed out the folly of not making use of the abundant coloured labour so near at hand. But some politicians started the parrot cry "White Australia." The colours have been nailed to the mast, and who dare draw the nails? All coloured races must be kept out, they say. Turn out every Chinese from Australia to-morrow and Australia would have no vegetables. Australians are objecting now to the Southern Latins. But there is one thing certain: If Australia is determined to keep itself white by choice it will not be many years before that white is turned yellow, by force.

Do those wonderful surf-bathers at Coogee, Bondi, and those other sun-blessed beaches, never see anything beyond the breakers more terrible than sharks? Stand on your toes and look over the foaming crests, and you will see the waters of an ocean, an open road of only a few days' journey to countless millions of yellow men, the finest fighting material in the world as General Gordon described the Chinese, millions who are gazing across the sea to your country with envious eyes. For their countrymen who have returned to them from Australia with fortunes, have told them wondrous tales of how easy it is to live and thrive there.

And what of Japan? That Germany of the East! How would your poll tax of £100 a head help you if she wanted to find room for

some millions of her superfluous population? She could lay Brisbane and Sydney and Melbourne in ashes and you have not got a gun that could reach half-way to them, or a ship that could live against them. You have so much sun to make everything bright. There are so few days on which you cannot play cricket or tennis or race or bathe or picnic. So few days on which you are obliged to sit at home and read, and think how you could keep that home if the yellow peril came. Australian manhood would turn out in their thousands to repel the invader, but in 1924 there was not 24-hours' rifle ammunition in the country. It is to the British Navy that we in Australia are indebted for our so-far uninterrupted pleasure in the sun. And yet there are some fools in Australia who have wanted to cut the painter. But England is 13,000 miles away, her China fleet is no longer all-powerful. Britain is not in the holding vein. Her weak politicians have lost her Ireland, Egypt, South Africa. And India is going. Could she help Australia to keep it white if the Germany of the Orient tore up its scrap of paper? Already in the North of Australia the Chinese and the Japanese are percolating into the country. Government in the Northern Territory is almost farcical according to the Press, the Australian Press. Java, with a teeming population of about 40,000,000, is only a few days' sail away. And brown and yellow are continually landing on the coast. Thursday Island is practically Japanese. Anyhow, they rule the roost. And so they do in Broome in far Western Australia. If there were coloured labour in Australia many of the deserted gold mines could be worked at a profit. And this would lead to the employment of whites as supervisors, overseers, etc., etc., But the gold in these old mines cannot be worked at a profit at the Australian miners' pay, which is about 16s. per day. A Chinese can live on a few pence a week. Why should whites be expected to, or ask to, do coolie labour? And without coolie labour Australia will never expand. With millions upon millions of English capital spent on Australia and administered by a board of business men and experts of both countries, with no pick-pocket politicians to interfere, with coolie labour for the donkey work, there would be sufficient *white man's* work for the many Australian unemployed and for thousands upon thousands of English immigrants, who would then have a real chance to make good. Labour Governments have always played the devil with Australia. Take Queensland, for a bright example. For about 14 years she has had a Labour Government. Her credit is gone. She has lost millions on railways and everything else. She is the dearest state to live in and wages are forced up, and she has thousands of unemployed. The labour laws are most irksome. I'll give an example. I had a wardrobe mistress. I took her from Sydney to Brisbane. In Sydney I paid her £7 a week and well satisfied. On taking her to Brisbane I was

forced to pay her £13 a week and engage two local needlewomen to assist her, which she did not want, at £5 a week each. No wonder Queensland is on the verge of ruin. But sooner or later the Labour Government will go. No Labour Government ever has or ever will succeed in governing. They are not the governing class. You cannot train and expect a Shire horse to win the Epsom Derby. Same thing !

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Australia Still—I Visit my Birthplace—My Last Night—The Storm—I bid Australia Farewell

FROM Sydney we went to Melbourne, opening at His Majesty's Theatre with *Cairo* to our record house, £727. Here we also put on *Chu Chin Chow* and *Julius Cæsar*, to our performance of which my old school, the Melbourne Grammar, honoured me by attending *en bloc*. Again we had a most successful season. From Melbourne we travelled to Perth. This was absurd booking, as we could have played there on our way home instead of returning from Perth to Adelaide. This journey entailed an expenditure of over £4,000 in fares and freights, whereas had we left it to the end of the tour it would have only cost about one-fourth. We played in Perth for three weeks, presenting *Cairo* and *Chu Chin Chow*, which they had never seen there. We were told we should play to £9,000, probably £10,000. As a matter of fact, we played to over £11,000, breaking all records. But expenses were piled on. I found the venture was charged with £150 for putting a bath in my dressing-room, and £60 for the hire of a dressing-table, a rug, a wardrobe and a chair for three weeks. Twenty pounds would have bought the whole lot.

Perth is a five days' journey from Melbourne. From Perth we travelled by the transcontinental train to Adelaide. We passed through the deserted mining town of Coolgardie, a pitiful, depressing sight, and Kalgoorlie. Water is pumped to these two towns from Perth, a distance of 600 miles. There is a most tragic story connected with this great engineering feat. The engineer who carried out the work, when the whole thing was completed, had estimated that water started from the reservoir at Perth would flow into Kalgoorlie on a certain day. It did not do so, nor on the day following nor on the day following that. People began to call him a charlatan. They accused him of having spent public money on a fraud. He was worried. The water did not flow in. The limit came when his wife one day turned on him, telling him she had been pointed at in the streets as the wife of that rogue (I forget his name). He committed suicide. The following day the water flowed into Kalgoorlie. Then they put up a statue of him. Splendid! He had in his reckoning not taken into account some trivial thing which caused the delay of

the water on its maiden voyage. Afterwards it was demonstrated by experiment that water pumped in at Perth reached its destination in exactly the time he had calculated.

The train journey was most uninteresting and dirty. They advertised the fact that there are shower-baths on board. You get a little trickle which would about fill a tea-cup. Through the desert for day after day you stop at miserable little wayside platforms. It is a pathetic sight to see the wives of the officials in their terrible houses, how they have planted bits of green stuff in kerosene tins. We saw a few miserable aborigines who entertained us by throwing the boomerang. I think it is at Port Augusta you change into a funny little train like a tramcar, and from this, farther on, you change again. We played at Adelaide a fortnight and here they tried to make the venture pay £512 16s. od. for structural alterations to the theatre.

From Adelaide we were booked to jump to Brisbane, a distance of something like 2,000 miles by train, but I managed to have a break at Sydney, where we arrived to find ourselves advertised for a fortnight only. However, it is not my intention to dwell on these unpleasant happenings. But in Sydney I collected a rather good story.

A gentleman connected with the theatre, by name Tom Nit, came in one night with the local manager to discuss a certain matter with me. Now, on every former occasion I had always offered them a whisky-and-soda and a cigarette. And the invitation was always accepted. But on this occasion the whisky-decanter standing on my desk happened to be locked. I extended no invitation, but after a little while Tom Nit turned round and took up the decanter to help himself. He found it locked, so I called out to my man Gross to come in and unlock it, which he did, and Tom Nit helped himself and the manager, and then asked me if I were having one. "Thank you," I said, "I will have a little of my own whisky." Then, as he handed it to me, I remarked, "Do you know, Tom Nit, I have been in this country nearly a year, and *you* have never offered *me* a drink at your expense yet." "Good God, Oscar," he exclaimed, "*you've never asked me to.*" This was all over Sydney the next day, for his nearness was notorious. I happened to be passing the Hotel Australia that morning, when Clay Smith and Lee White beckoned to me from the opposite side of the street. When I reached them, Lee White said, "Good God, Oscar, you've never asked me to." It became a kind of pass-word.

From Sydney we travelled to Brisbane, and here at last my old Rolls-Royce, newly-painted and varnished and upholstered, arrived from London. At Brisbane I stopped at a hotel, I think it was called the Belle Vue. It was owned and managed by a dear old

Irishwoman of about eighty years of age, with the gift of the blarney. Oh, she was that proud to have me at her hotel, and so on and so on. More than once she said to me: "Do you know what I'd do if I had a million pounds?" "No," I would answer. "I'd give it all to you." And she said it so sweetly and sincerely in her old Irish brogue that I really began to believe it, and wonder how much she wanted to make up a million. I was all by myself, except for my valet, and I had only a combined room to myself. I did not entertain that week at all. On Sunday morning, after our ten days' season, we had to catch the 8 a.m. train to Sydney. It was about 6 a.m., and I was shaving, when Mrs. — knocked at my door to say good-bye. She was off to early Mass. She kissed me good-bye, with tears in her sweet old eyes, and in a heartbroken voice she again told me what she would do with a million pounds. Ten minutes after she had departed, I got my bill. £90 for ten days! So when I wrote out the cheque I wrote this on the back of it: "Do you know what *I* would do if I had a million pounds? *I'd have* to give them all to you." Oh, these dear Irish!

From Brisbane we were booked to Auckland, another nice long journey. And there was a clause in the contract that stipulated the journeys were to be as short as possible. In New Zealand we had a ripping good time, motoring everywhere through some of the most magnificent scenery in the world. And the business broke all records. But the Labour laws over there made it very uncomfortable for those on the stage to have their meals at their accustomed times. An actor and actress, as a rule, take nothing between lunch and supper, but at all the hotels it was impossible to get anything hot after we returned from the theatre. The inevitable cold chicken and ham always ready, present arms, as it were. And as we were doing a lot of motoring and cold food at that time of the year being somewhat chillsome, I invented a cooker, a portable cooker. I got a cabinet-maker in Wellington to make one according to my design. It was very rough but served its purpose. By its aid we were able to stew, fry, grill, bake, boil. Many a picnic did some of us have with it. When I returned to Sydney I improved on it, and took out patents for it all over the world. And I also sold the Australian and New Zealand rights. But of my precious cooker hereafter. We were in New Zealand eight weeks, and never missed a night, as some companies do, owing to travel difficulties. At Timaru, quite a small town, we played *Cairo* for one night only, and took £667. At Wellington I received a bit of a surprise one morning. I was in my bath, and my man called to me that a newspaper reporter wished to see me. I got into my dressing-gown and went into the sitting-room. He had come to verify or deny the reports in the London Press that I was dead. I was very much alive. My stepbrother Jack had died a few days before,

HIS LIFE

in Queensland, and as it is an uncommon name, they jumped to the conclusion it was I.

We were all sorry to say good-bye to New Zealand. The people are so kind and so English. I had some trout-fishing there. Rainbow trout up to 25 lbs., and I believe more, are caught. I killed one of 17 lbs. and several over 10 lbs. Parts of this country are very like Scotland, and inhabited by men, women and children who, though they have never seen Scotland, speak the very broadest Scotch. They are the descendants of the gillies who brought over the deer from Scotland and which are now almost a pest in the country of their adoption. An effort is being made to introduce grouse. Pheasants and partridges, I understand, are already at home there. It should be the sportsman's paradise. There are no snakes there. Apropos of that, when we played *Kismet* there, in which play we used several pythons, we had to obtain special permission, and they were under a heavy bond. After we had finished playing *Kismet*, a couple of enterprising young Jews arranged to pay us £10 a week for the loan of them. They used to take them to agricultural shows and put up a tent and charge 6d. a head to the inhabitants to see real live snakes. At one show they took £125 in one day. The snakes eventually perished in a fire at a hotel where the two showmen were staying. And we had great difficulty in persuading the authorities that they had really passed away.

On our return to Sydney I produced Pinero's *Iris*. It was strange playing Maldonado after a lapse of twenty-seven years, but I loved the part and naturally gave a riper performance. After *Iris*, which ran several weeks, I revived *Othello*, which I had not played for ten years. Fortunately I am not only a quick study but a retentive one, and without reference to the text I knew not only my own part but everyone else's. This memory came in useful when we started rehearsing *Julius Cæsar*. I had not played in it for ten years, but I had played every part except Cæsar in my time. We had no books. We had to wait two days for them. So I got a stenographer and dictated the entire play as I had played it last. And I had not made more than a dozen mistakes in the text. I suppose as I get older I shall lose my memory. But I have not lost it so far, nor my hair, nor a tooth. So luck has stuck to me in some things.

During our stay in Sydney I set to work on my patent cooker and perfected it. I also introduced into it an ice-chest in which ice would keep for three days. Before leaving Sydney I disposed of the Australian rights for £500 and 10 per cent of the sale price. Several people who made a hobby of camping out bought them and found them most useful. I gave several demonstrations, proving that it was wind and weather proof and perfectly safe. I took a car-load of friends up to the Blue Mountains, and when we returned on

the Monday there was still ice in the chest. I took it out on the foot-board of my car to Randwick race-course one race day, and cooked a lunch for eight people not including myself. The cook was too busy to eat. I gave the lunchers oysters off the ice, tomato and lobster soup, Murray cod in Chablis, a mixed grill with peas and *sauté* potatoes, asparagus off the ice, and an *omelette au Rhum*. Some of them did not see the next race. I had a lot of fun with it, one way and another. At the end of the Sydney season, and as we were not returning, I said good-bye to my flat, which I had taken for the two years, and where I had been most comfortable. As we had a fortnight out, I decided to motor by the coast route to Melbourne. I took a friend with me, Bobbie Metcalf, and my valet Gross, and also a canine friend, a little black Pom. I had a good chauffeur and we took four spares, to be well prepared for trouble. And, of course, I took my cooker, with its pots and pans and grids, and the canteen on the running-board filled with good wine and spirits, a sporting rifle and a double-barrelled 12-bore and a small tent, and off we started on what proved to be the most enjoyable motor trip I have ever had. And I have had a good many.

We set out on Saturday afternoon and planned to reach Melbourne the following Wednesday. Saturday evening we struck bad weather and we had to cook our meal inside the car all closed in. The rain came down in torrents; it was useless to camp out, so we put up for the night at a hotel at Boural. We were off again Sunday morning. We halted and cooked breakfast and motored on until dinner-time. We bought fresh meat and vegetables on the way, and it brought back the adventure of my boyhood's days, when I was free of care. I must have passed over some of the old road, or very near it, though we went by the Bulli Pass. Sunday night, after dinner, we got into the middle of the most violent thunderstorm I have ever known. The road was alive with lightning, trees crashed and the thunder drowned all speech. And the rain poured down in a sheet, as it can only do there. I expected, and I think we all expected, at any moment to be struck either by the crashing trees or the lightning. One huge monster of a tree fell across the road as we were passing under it. The chauffeur accelerated just in time. At last, in the early morning, after crossing, I think, a couple of rivers by ferry, we pulled up in the small hours of the morning at a considerable-sized township and knocked up an hotel and had a drink and turned in. We rose in the morning about seven. It was a glorious day. And there was the sea, and a beach, and a beautiful bathing-pool. So we all went in, Pom and all. Here I bought fish and oysters, which we cooked later on. We journeyed on and on, and just beforehand we pitched our tent for the first time at Malacoota Point. Here I went out with the gun and got a few rabbits, just as I had done so many years ago.

And I cooked them the same way, but on my cooker. There was good bathing, and after a good late dinner we lit a fire to keep the mosquitoes off, sat smoking round the fire, chin-chinning for hours. I woke in the morning, as I had years ago, to the sound of magpies and the kookaburra (laughing jackass) and the rabbits scampering about. But how different it all was ! We had a bathe before breakfast, and then we broke camp and journeyed on. On the way we stopped at a field where Indian corn was growing, and poached several green cobs for lunch when we should have it. We had bought some meat and other things at a place called, I think, Genoa, after leaving Malacoota Point.

I had almost forgotten an amusing incident on the Monday. We arrived a little after one o'clock at a little township on the coast. I think it was called Eden. The chauffeur said we wanted some petrol, so we pulled up at a garage next door to an old country pub, the proprietor of which, in his shirt-sleeves, was leaning against a post outside his door, smoking a short clay pipe. He said nothing, just looked the car and us up and down. "Now," I said to Metcalf, "we'll have a jolly good lunch." At this the pub proprietor spat on the ground and spoke in Australian. That is, he introduced the meaningless word "bloody" before every word. I leave a blank, to avoid repetition. "You get no — lunch in my — hotel. My — lunch starts at 12 o' — clock, and ends at 1.0' — clock." To which I replied so that he could the better understand, "We want no — lunch in your — vermined hotel. We're going to have a — good lunch in our — car." Gross opened the cooker. "What will you have, sir ? Oyster soup, grilled porterhouse steak, potatoes in their jackets, fried onions, and cheese omelette to follow." The old publican never moved a muscle, and presently a small crowd collected, and watched the steam rising from the pots, and the onions spitting, and, later, the steak frizzling with apparently no flame, because, being in the sunlight the methylated spirit's flame is almost invisible. "A cocktail, sir ?" said Gross. "Please," said we. So to the canteen he went, pulled out the gin, the vermouth, and lemon and *crème de menthe*, put the right quantities into the shaker, and then lifted up the lid of the ice-chest next to the steaming and frizzling food, and spiked and pulled out a handful of ice. This was too much for Mr. Publican. He let his pipe drop out of his jaws on to the ground, and exclaiming, "He's got — ice," he entered his hotel, slammed the doors, and bolted them, and appeared no more.

Gross was becoming quite an adept cook under my tuition, and was very fond of mystifying the natives with the cooker. We had one stretch of road through 70 miles of forest, absolutely monotonous in character. Giant gum-trees, I think they were iron barks, and

almost as numerous, giant tree ferns. But not a sound of life, except occasionally parrots, but I never caught sight of a kangaroo or wallaby the whole way. At long intervals we passed small isolated hotels, where lunch and tea were advertised. The "coast route" is growing very popular with motorists, and the roads are for the most part excellent. We had no tyre-trouble the whole journey. Tuesday night we passed alongside the famous Gippsland Lakes, the hotels and boarding-houses crammed with visitors. That night we put up at an hotel just past the lakes. The hotel was full, but on hearing it was Oscar Asche, rooms were vacated for us. I was an Australian, and they were proud of me, and everywhere I met with wonderful kindness. Soon the news spread and a crowd collected outside the hotel and called "Oscar Asche!" So I had to appear and make a bit of a speech, thanking them. We were tired, and soon turned in. I had almost dozed off, when my bedroom door was opened, and in came a man, very intoxicated, with a guttering candle. "Hello, Ossy, my boy," he called out cheerily. "What are you doing here?" I asked. "I'm going to sleep with you, Ossy, my boy." "I'm damned well sure you're not," I exclaimed. "You've come to the wrong room." "Aren't you Osborne?" he asked. He was too blind to keep his eyes open. "No, I'm not. Please leave the room." "Well, they told me downstairs that I had to share my room with Osborne, because they had given his room to Oscar Asche." "Well, I am Oscar Asche," I explained, "and I've been put here." He apologized himself out of the room. After that, I locked the door. In the morning we started off before breakfast on the last stage of our journey. About lunch-time I espied a beautiful wattle-fringed creek which passed under a bridge on the main road, with the usual drive down off the roadside. So down we drove, and pulled up in the most delightful grassy spot, with a clear running stream over pebbles and absolutely hidden from the road. But we were not the first campers there. Sitting on his heels, and smoking his pipe, a regular old sundowner (tramp), was feeding his fire with little bits of wood very gently. On the fire two well-blackened billies. One was, of course, tea, and in the other were some mutton-bones for broth. His bluey was on the ground and by his side his little fox-terrier. How it brought back the old days, and Parkes! Two campers-out, but what a difference! He with his faithful hound, his pots and pans and blankets and his two legs to carry him, and I with my cooker and canteen and 40-50 Rolls-Royce. Which of us was the better off, the happier? He, for a thousand. Whilst Gross was preparing lunch I had a chat with him. He joined us in a cocktail. He was an educated man. "You're Oscar Asche," he said. I admitted it. "I was just reading about you in the paper. Here's your photograph," and he showed me a Melbourne paper, a fortnight old, announcing my coming

season. He had tramped from Melbourne. "I saw you in the Old Country," he went on. "Oh, it must be something like twenty years ago, at the Adelphi, *The Taming of the Shrew*. You were slimmer then," he added. I laughed, but I didn't ask him his history. He would tell it of his own accord, if he wanted to. If he didn't, a thumb-screw or the rack wouldn't get it out of him. "I'm older than you," he went on, and he had another cocktail. "I'm sixty. I was a school-master, and I got into trouble backing losers. No matter the school, no matter the trouble. But I had to skip. I came out here. Landed with a little over a hundred pounds, blued it on racing, and here I am. And not a bad life, either. Healthy and independent. Always a bit of work to be found along the road, no responsibilities." I asked him where he was making for. "Anywhere, nowhere. As long as I can fill my pipe and my stomach, every place is as good as another." Well, we had our lunch. And then I asked him if he could do with things we did not want to carry along, as we were reaching Melbourne in a few hours. "Oh, anything you can spare," he laughed. "I'm not proud." So I loaded him well up. The best part of a leg of mutton, tea, sugar, bread, butter, sauces, coffee, beer, whisky, gin, some tinned food, etc., etc., and a tin of cigarettes. "I can't carry all this," he said, "so I'll stop here until it's done in." Well, he couldn't have had a better spot. In bad weather he could sleep under the arch of the bridge, building a wind-screen with leaves and branches. I was also able to give him some magazines and novels, which we had read. Then we packed up the cooker and shook hands, and drove off. He came to the road with us, he and his dog, and waved good-bye as we shot off. No, his was not a bad life, by any means.

The remainder of the journey was dull and dragged. We had left Romance behind us. It had been to me a taste of youth again. I felt old, so old, as I looked back on the intervening years. The years between setting out on Sambo and setting out on my Rolls-Royce. I had said good-bye to Sydney for the last time. Soon I should be bidding Melbourne farewell. Our season in Melbourne was a most successful season, after *Iris*, which they did not care for much. *Othello* I played for four weeks on end. *The Taming of the Shrew* was put up for the first time this trip, for one week only. But things now were being made very difficult for me, but I was hitting back all the time. After Melbourne we played one night in Geelong, my native town. This was my first appearance there. I motored over and had lunch at my birthplace, Mack's Hotel. I visited the room where as a child I had given my fourth birthday party, and the room where I was born. This room I did *not* recognize! After lunch I went on to the Town Hall, where I was given a civic reception by the Mayor and Aldermen. There were thousands

outside to give me a cheer, and the big council-room was crammed. In my reply to the Mayor's speech, I recalled some of my early remembrances of Geelong. I mentioned how, as a small boy, I had spent a couple of holidays there with some old friends of my father's, a Mr. and Mrs. William Brown, grocers. I told them how I used to love driving out in the grocer's van, with the man delivering parcels, and how he used to let me hold the horse. At that, an old gentleman rose near-by and came over to me. "Fancy you remembering that," he said, holding out his hand, and there were tears in his eyes. It was the driver of all those many years ago, now a man of over seventy, and on the City Council. I also met several men who remembered my father, of course, much younger than he was. But I had a chat with one old fellow. He was a small, stumpy man with white hair and white whiskers, like Ibsen. "I am Frenchy," he said to me. "Old Frenchy. I used to drive your dad in my hansom in Melbourne. I had to meet the train every morning, in case he was in it. And he paid me a pound a day, whether he turned up or not." So that's where I got my extravagant habits from. I remember the name "Frenchy" well enough, now I heard it again. The old fellow chatted and told jokes about my father, and how those who knew him used to persuade those who didn't know him to shake hands with him.

From Melbourne we motored to Ballarat, where we also played one night, *Othello* being the play in each town. I had never been there before, but I found my father's name was well known from the old gold-digging days. I met an old lady there whose late husband had been my father's partner in a mine. It was supposed to be a very good claim that they pegged out. "One day," she said, "my husband left your father in charge whilst he saw about some shopping. Now if a claim is left unattended, anyone can "jump" it, that is, he has the right to claim it as his. Your father got tired of his own company, and, not thinking, went to the nearest saloon for a drink and a game of cards. When he returned a few hours later, there were three men in possession. They had jumped it, and it was theirs legally. He expostulated, but they pointed out the position to him. There were three of them. He looked at them, and walked away back to the saloon. He told his friends what had happened. They could not help him. Or dared not. "Well," said he, "I'll throw them out myself. By Creation, I do." And those in the saloon followed him out to see the fun. He went to a store, and there he bought a long stout rope. Then he persuaded the storekeeper to lend him a 56-lb. weight from his weighing apparatus. With a rope in one hand and the half-hundredweight in the other, he made for the jumped claim, with the procession following. Arrived there, he invited the three jumpers to come out and fight him, one by one

or all together. They weren't having any. They had their picks and spades in their hands, waiting for him to take the offensive. Then he took off his shirt, displaying his great chest and enormous arms. Quietly he made fast one end of the rope to the handle of the 56-lb. weight. He told the crowd who had followed him to stand farther back. Then he took hold of the rope with the weight attached, and started swinging it round his head, as a boy does a sling. He gradually worked this up till it was swinging round his head at a radius of a score of yards. Then, still swinging it so that the weight was only a few inches above the ground, he started walking towards the three jumpers on his claim. Nearer and nearer to them he walked, until the weight was hurtling over the edge of the pegged-out boundary of the claim. The three men retreated. Felix kept on walking. Nearer and nearer. The crowd began to laugh and jeer and cheer. The half-hundredweight struck the wooden structure above the shaft and sent it splintering to Kingdom-come. And Felix kept on walking. One man reached out an axe, thinking to cut the swinging rope. The weight caught it on the blade and sent it whizzing like a boomerang through the air. Gradually they retreated as the weight got nearer their shins, until they dropped pick-axe and spade and jumped out of reach. "I'll teach you game of yump," yelled the bearded David. "I'll teach you to yump, By Creation! And as they jumped out, he jumped in, and he had *used no force*, which is illegal."

Such was the story I gathered from the old lady. And she gave me a photograph, one of those old tin affairs, of her husband and father, dressed in their Sunday best. Father with his hand on his partner's shoulder, and the partner sitting on what looked like a horsehair chair, and his arm resting on what I supposed was the family album. This precious work of art passed away with many others when my farm was inexcusably raided by the British Official Receiver's parasites. I think one of those gentlemen must have been called Autolycus. From Ballarat, which should be spelt *Baal*, aborigine's word for not or no, *a-rat*, meaning, not a rat. I do not know whether it was ever appropriate. From Ballarat, I was saying, we went to Adelaide. And there all my remaining company who had come out from England "got the sack". All except Doris Champion, my then leading lady. "All my pretty chickens, and their damn stage-manager, at one fell swoop." I did not "dispute it like a man", or anything else. It was all done to annoy me. So back I went to Melbourne to rehearse a new company in Galsworthy's *The Skin Game*.

In Adelaide I had a funny interview. A lady had written me stating she had been to school with me, and would like to see me again. I did not remember her maiden name. She was now married.

I made an appointment and she came to see me. I was going out to golf, and I felt and looked remarkably well that morning, I thought. I could not recall her face. She was well over seventy. But she knew me again, she said. I had been to school with her in Camperdown. I told her I had never been to Camperdown, and suggested it must have been my brother Jack. "No, it was you, Oscar. My mother used to nurse you on her knee." I told her she must be mistaken. No, she stuck to it. "Well, what age do you think I am?" I asked. (I was then about fifty-four). She looked at me. "I know you have all your hair and only just grey at the sides, and you wear well, but I was saying to my husband only this morning— If Oscar's a day, he must be seventy-two."

I went out to golf, but I did not enjoy it. It seemed a very tedious, wearisome game. Seventy-two! Not my score, but my age. Ye gods! In Melbourne I joined my new company.

A company the majority of which fawned on the hand that fed them; and that hand was not mine. But there were one or two, perhaps three, who were not "fortune's slaves", and one of them was old John Cosgrove, a rare good actor, but unfortunately an enemy to himself. He is dead now. A good old chap, anyhow. During my Melbourne season I met an old friend, John Stephenson, the Norwegian, who was boots and night-porter at the hotel, and who helped me to escape from father's wrath one morning. You may remember the story. After all these years we met again, and his fine sons were introduced to me, and the old man and I exchanged stories about father till tears of laughter were rolling down our cheeks.

The production of *The Skin Game* was a great success, and despite the opposition of Melba's Opera season at His Majesty's Theatre we did capacity business. After we had been playing a fortnight, the enemy held out the olive-branch. A meeting was arranged at which everything seemingly passed off amicably, and a tour of twenty weeks was promised with *The Skin Game*. But it turned out to be a gaudily-coloured fly. And though the fish struck, he was able to free himself of the hook before the gaff could be used. When the game was blown, my solicitor advised me to finish my contract on the original date, 13th June, and not continue to 5th July, as had been suggested in lieu of the twenty weeks. And so, on Friday, 13th June, I played for the last time in Australia—*The Skin Game*. Apt. Very Apt. We had a wonderful house. And what a night it turned out to be! I had no inkling of what was going to happen. Now, as the story of that night was broadcasted in England the same evening, there can be no harm in repeating the facts. Before the curtain had touched the stage, after the last Act, the orchestra started the National Anthem. But the auditorium was kept in pitch darkness. In a flash I guessed right. I was to be prevented making

a speech. "The thief doth fear each bush an officer" (*Henry VI*, Part III). And certain people feared I might attack them. So they tried to hide behind "God Save the King". But before it was over I went in front of the curtain, which the stage-manager had orders not to take up. Two enemy stage-hands tried to prevent me by force as I was going in front. But I did a bit of rough-house. I stamped heavily with my heel on one man's instep and jogged my elbow into the other man's mouth, leaving him with the prospect of a heavy dentist's bill. Then the stage-manager warned me he would let the iron curtain down on me. But, of course, he did not.

The orchestra was just playing the final bars of "The King". Then up went the lights, and the band began playing tiddly bits for the audience to walk out to. But the audience were yelling, "Speech, Oscar. Speech!" And the managers and ushers in front were yelling, "This way, ladies and gentlemen, this way out. It's all over." But it was not all over. I could not speak, as the orchestra would drown me. On comes, before the curtain, Doris Champion. She shouts in my ear, "Oscar, you must stop this." "How can I with the band playing?" I shout back. "Then I will," and at the word she jumps over the footlights on to the top of the piano, and thence to the floor, garrottes the conductor with one arm and with her free hand snatches the baton out of his hand. Then the band stops, the audience cheer, and I speak. Yes, I do speak now. Not what I had intended—a speech of thanks for their kind patronage during the two years I had been playing before Australian audiences, but a speech about certain people. "They are a lot of dirty dogs," comes a general shout. And I agree with them. And then they proceed to count the dirty dogs out, as a referee counts out a boxer who has taken the knock. After a fairly long speech, in which I raised a few laughs, especially in quoting a speech of Touchstone's in *As You like It*, about a certain knight who swore by his honour to something false not being foresworn, because he never had any honour to swear by, we all said good nights and good lucks. The poor little conductor came round to see me and apologized. But, as I told him, he had to live. Next day, though, a woman on the tramcar recognizing him, and wrongly blaming him for the incident, struck him, knocking him off the tram. Behind the curtain there had been a little scrapping between the rival factions. The crowd was waiting outside for me when I left, and I had trouble in getting clear.

I had to wait more than a week before the *Mooltan* sailed. *The Skin Game* opened with two understudies the following night, and with different scenery and properties, for I had got an injunction against the others being used, but instead of playing to over £400 a night, as formerly, they played to empty houses, and closed down quickly. I spent the day going racing whenever any was on, playing

tennis, and the Melba opera in the evening, so time did not hang heavily. Also I gave, during my stay in Melbourne, several demonstrations with my cooker. At one I demonstrated its usefulness before, I think, fifty or sixty lady-cooks. I made and cooked half a dozen different soups, having six cookers at work, six different fish-dishes, grills, casseroles, roast birds, six sweets and the same number of savouries. It was all very good fun. At last the time came to say farewell, I suppose for ever, to Australia. I made a round of all my old and tried friends, and there are not many in this world. Charlie Mitchell was just the same as ever, in a way. Old Mitchell had died and left a vast sum of money to each of his children. Charlie and his wife had done Europe, and Charlie was now walking about wearing, or rather, carrying, a pair of wash-leather gloves. He seemed unhappy about them, and yet in a way proud of the fact that he had them. I think he looked upon them as some insignia of class or rank. They certainly took up a lot of his time. And he had a stick, too. And when invited to have a drink, he had to do a bit of conjuring to get a hand free from either stick or gloves to lift the glass. First he would put them in his pocket, but no, that would spoil the flatness of his pocket. He would put them in his stick hand, and his stick would clatter on to the floor. I don't think he enjoyed his drink half as much as he did in the old days before he was a "masher".

I bade good-bye to all my cricketing pals. The Australian Eleven of 1921 had given me a welcoming dinner on my arrival, and the Fitzroy Cricket Club made me a presentation and elected me an honorary life-member. A farewell lunch was given in my honour at the Melbourne Town Hall, and was attended by several hundred well-known men in every walk of life, men of every profession, and cricketers, footballers, athletes in every branch of sport. The menu was illustrated with photos of myself from a little kid to that present day.

On my last morning in Melbourne I drove from the flat in my car, calling at my solicitor's. As I stepped from the car a man standing by asked me if I wanted to sell her (the car). I told him I had not thought of it, but was just about to make arrangements for it being shipped after me. However, he offered me £500 spot cash for her as she stood. As she was fourteen years old and I had done over 200,000 miles in her, I sold her. He was to take delivery at the quay, so he drove down with me. I kissed the old girl good-bye, taking the mascot with me, a silver model of that famous greyhound Fullerton, and got on the ship just in time. A crowd of faithful friends from either side of the curtain had come to wave me off. "And this is the last time I see you," I said to myself as we moved away and away.

I had paid three visits to Australia, and I had played in all over

fifteen hundred performances, and had never been off one night. Not a bad record. Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, Brutus and Antony in *Julius Cæsar*, Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Shylock*, Jacques in *As You Like It*, *Falstaff*, Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Hajj in *Kismet*, Count Hannibal, Count in *Honeymoon*, *Chu Chin Chow*, Ali Shar in *Cairo*, Patrick O'Gorman in *The Spanish Main*, Maldonado in *Iris*, Hæphæstus in *The Virgin Goddess*, and Hornblower in *The Skin Game*. I had travelled between 110,000 and 115,000 miles to do so, and played to nearly half a million sterling.

And here I wish to thank all those many thousands Australian friends whom I had never had the pleasure of meeting except across the footlights for all their wonderful appreciation and encouragement. And I thank the many thousands who knew me by name only, as an Australian who had come home after making good in the big world. Wherever I went you all greeted me and treated me as a brother Aussie. I shall never forget it. I only hope that some day I may see you all again. To you all I drink a toast—in billy tea.

Coo-ee !

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

London Again, and the Flop at His Majesty's—My Farm—The Organized Wrecking of the Good Old Days—I Take the Count—Struggling

I ARRIVED back in London the middle of August, 1924, after more than two years abroad. I was approached almost immediately by Grossmith and Malone to produce and play a part in a translation of a French comedy called *The Royal Visitor*. I was told it was a great success in Paris, was very clever, and that my part was a fine character-study. I read the play and thought it was tosh, and said so. I was told that as I had been abroad so long I could not appreciate something very good. I suppose, if one travels a lot, sees new countries and new peoples and new customs, all constantly changing, one cannot expect the brain to be as bright as that of a vegetable. I gave the show a month at most. They gave it "till after Christmas". It was then September. It was impossible to impart any humour into it, even with the great little artiste Yvonne Arnaud in the caste, and that sprightly and evergreen comedian George Grossmith cavorting about as a detective disguised as a lady's hairdresser. It was produced at His Majesty's Theatre, and it got the bird. And justly so. The poor old theatre had passed through rough times since we left it after *Cairo* in 1922. *Hassan*, a beautiful piece of work, but crudely produced, started off with a great rush, but in the end, so I am told, there was a credit balance of something under a pound.

After the show was over on the first night, which was a Saturday, I motored back to my farm in Gloucester, 110 miles away. On Sunday morning I telephoned to London to learn what the notices were like. As I anticipated, rotten. On Monday morning I caught the early train to London and read all the nasty notices in the morning Press. I went to the theatre. Pat Malone said: "Well, Oscar, what would you do?" "Shut down to-night," I advised. But they ran it till the end of the week. The shortest run I had ever been in. A contrast to *Chu*. The worst of it was, some people thought I must have had something to do with the choice of the play. But I certainly was foolish to have had anything to do with it.

After this fiasco I buried myself down at my farm, with my spaniels and White West Highlanders and Facey, and started writing

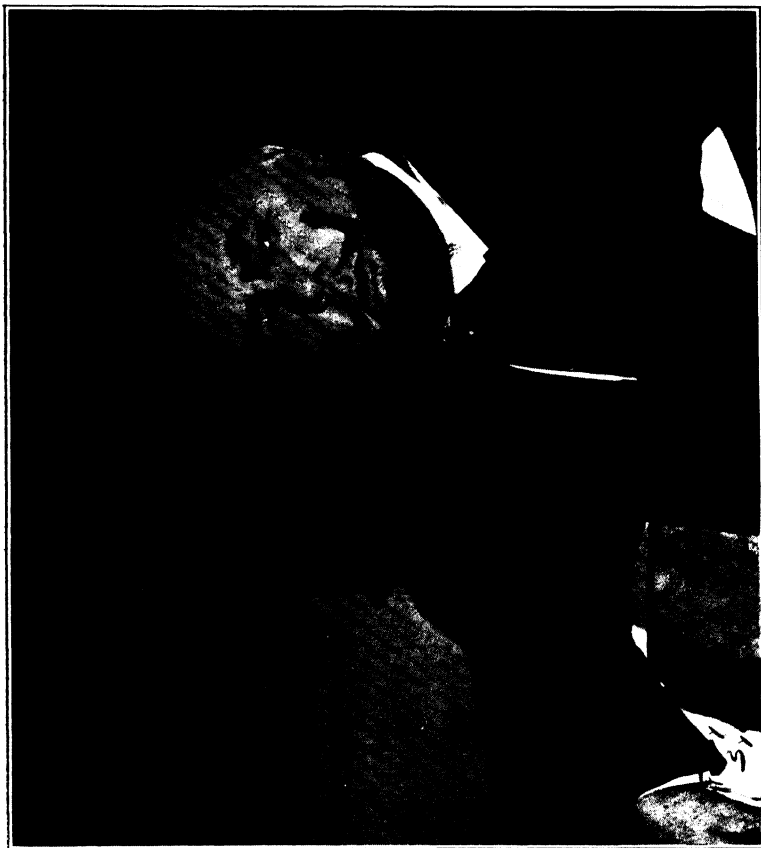
a new musical play. I was also busy with my cooker, and had about one hundred of them made. I sold a good many privately, and gave demonstrations. I could not, however, find anyone to put in capital for their mass production. The utility of the cooker was not questioned. I fried a two-pound trout in butter and grilled a two-pound steak, and steamed onions and potatoes on my car, going at 50 miles an hour and no wind-screen. One Sunday in the summer, a party of ten descended on me. José Collins, Bobbie Evett, Lord Innes Kerr, Spencer Trevor, Teddie Gwenn, and others. And I cooked their lunch for them on my cooker on the lawn, a dozen trout straight out of the water and a 14-lb. sirloin, with two vegetables. Whilst the joint was roasting we strolled about the farm. I had turkeys and geese and ducks and fowls and pigs and cows and sheep and horses, and Spencer Trevor, or "Trapsy", as we all call him, started making farmyard noises to each animal. But he got hopelessly mixed. He said "Moo" to a pig and "Quack-quack" to the geese. Then he spotted a turkey-gobbler drumming on the ground, blown-out with majestic pride, his gorgeous red wattles in full bursting bloom. Trapsy looked at it and exclaimed: "Mrs. Partick Campbell eating tomato soup."

Every Sunday I had jolly parties down there. I had bought a new car, a 40 Napier, very fast and very comfortable. I have done the journey from London to the farm, 110 miles, in two hours and forty minutes. Of course, in the early hours of Sunday morning. I used to make up parties, before going to Australia, of three besides myself, and motor down, perhaps having a game of golf at Huntercombe on the way. And on my return from Australia in 1924 I continued the practice. And many a jolly week-end we have spent there. In all, over ninety friends and members of the Green-Room Club have been down there at Sugby, and helped me to pass a cheery week-end. Bless 'em. I was always spending money on improvements. I had bought the farm, consisting of 120 acres, and an old Cotswold farmhouse for £5,000, and I had spent another five thousand on the house. And on my return in 1924 I extended the building, giving me a dining-room 30 feet long by 18 and 20 feet wide, at a further cost of £1,500. It was a most comfortable old place, full of oak beams. It was over 400 years old, and one of the walls was 5 feet 3 inches thick. But it was lonely at times. For months on end, during both *Chu* and *Cairo*, I used to catch the 1 a.m. train from Paddington after the show, reaching Stroud at 3.30, where my car was waiting for me. In bed, after a hot rum punch, by 4.15, and up at 8.30. If a *matinée* day, I had to catch the 10 a.m. train to Town. Otherwise the 3 p.m. train got me in in fine time for the evening performance.

Of course, the farm never paid. It was money going out all the time and nothing coming in. I began to realize that money would, before very long, be scarce. But I had every faith in the new play

I had written, and the music of which Percy Fletcher had composed. But of that hereafter.

About May, 1925, James White of Daly's Theatre rang me up. He wanted to see me. So I drove to London and saw him in his room at Daly's Theatre. He wanted me to produce *Cleopatra*, as he always would call that lady. Yes, I would. Terms quoted and accepted. Then he asked me if I knew anything about Cleopatra and Antony. I told him I did, adding that I had produced *Antony and Cleopatra* in Australia. "You couldn't have done," said he in his broad Lancashire, "because I own the world-rights." I explained I meant Shakespeare's play. "Oh, that silly —'s." Everyone to him was a silly idiot or a silly —. "Well, tell me about her," he said. I told him she was a Macedonian Greek. "Nay," said he, "she's Egyptian." "She was a Macedonian Greek," I insisted. "A bit of a b——, wasn't she?" he asked. "She was temperamental," I replied. "At twelve or fourteen she married her brother. "Married her brother?" he exclaimed. "She's a worse b—— than I thought she was. I don't think she's suitable to Daly's." After a while he said: "I'm in a bit of a difficulty about the last act. Antony and Cleopatra are in each other's arms, embracing, and we can't have any illicit love-making at Daly's." "No necessity," said I; "they were married." "Married," said Jimmy. "Who told you that?" "Matter of history," I said. "Can you give me proofs of their marriage to-morrow morning?" he asked anxiously. I replied I could. I drove back to the farm that night, and picked out a book about Cleopatra, by Weigall, and found the passage about the Egyptian priesthood ratifying their marriage. This the following morning I read to Jimmy White. "By gum," exclaimed he, thumping his knee, "you've got me out of a difficulty." Happening to mention one day that at the period of history in which the play was placed that Julius Cæsar was dead, he contradicted me. He had looked up the dates, and offered to bet me a thousand to one. And then triumphantly he read out the dates. Antony met Cleopatra in the year 37 and Julius Cæsar was assassinated in 42. "Five years after, you silly —." "Five years before." "How do you make that out, you — idiot?" So I explained to him the difference B.C. made. After a while, he said: "Well, all I can say is, I hate your — history." After I had left the afternoon rehearsal, he would call the company in the evening and rehearse them differently. "Just to see if you liked my way best," he would say. I didn't. And told him so. One morning I was sitting in the stalls by him, watching a scene between the two comedians. One was bargaining for certain concessions from Cleopatra and the other, her Chancellor, was naming the terms. "Three million gold pieces," he called. "Well, there they are," said the other comedian, pointing to a super who was holding



AS MALDONADO IN "IRIS" BY PINERO

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up three small leather bags. "Each bag contains a million golden pieces."

"You can't do that, Jimmy," I exclaimed. "Why not?" asked he. "Well, do you know the weight of three million gold coins—say three million golden sovereigns?" "No. Do you?" asked he. "Well, roughly, about twenty-one tons," I told him. "And that poor unfortunate super is holding up in his arms twenty-one tons dead-weight." Jimmy looked at me. "You're a punctilious —, aren't you? But we'll soon get over that difficulty. We'll make 'em *notes*."

He always had a way out. If he had let the play alone and had not so miscast it in certain parts, I think it would have been a success. But he had ordered the scenery before I took a hand in it, and he had simply wasted money on it. Some of his friends, who to their cost believed he was infallible, thought he knew everything about the theatre. He bluffed it. He knew nothing, absolutely nothing, and he had not the slightest pretensions to be artistic. But he interfered with everything. He could teach everyone their jobs. The orchestra, the chorus, the principals, the composer, the author. All were — idiots. Had he kept out of the theatre and other things he did not understand, he would never have had to find the final way out.

Cleopatra was a magnificent spectacle, but a poor story, and it was not funny. The Lancashire accent of the comedian, very funny and clever in other work, was somewhat out of the picture in old Egypt. Long after I had finished with it, White phoned me to see him next day. I did so. He had designed a new scene for the First Act. An exterior. Cleopatra's garden by the Nile. He took paper and pencil. "The backcloth is the Nile. In front of this five stone pergolas. In front of the pergolas," he explained, "is a riot of colour, every — flower you've ever seen or heard of. And between the two centre pergolas are palms that open *automatic*." "Why?" I asked. "For Cleopatra to make her entrance from her bath," he answered. "Where has she been bathing?" I inquired. "In the Nile, of course," he replied. "She's not afraid of crocodiles, then?" I ventured. "You — idiot," he exploded. "She's got a private swimming-bath all palisaded round." And he put this scene in, which must have cost several hundred pounds, for the last week of the run.

I understand that he was a very hard task-master, but I must say I never had any trouble with him.

I still remained buried down at the farm. My play was finished, and the music completed. I took it up to Town and read it. Capital was easily found, but I could not get a suitable theatre. I wanted Her Majesty's, but the rent asked, £700 a week, was absurd. The money I had earmarked for my share of the capital quickly melted

away. The farm simply gorged money. And every week-end was a party. Then came the moneylenders. I got whatever I asked for. I could have got double, treble the amount. However, for a time I managed to struggle along. Then at last we decided to do the new play at the Gaiety. We searched England for an Eric Grume, but could not find one. Nor a tenor. So we got a tenor from Portugal who spoke English. One of the Portuguese aristocracy. Cecil Alden designed the costumes and scenery. Joseph and Phil Harker painted it, and Simmons, as usual, made the dresses. Everyone who heard the play and music prophesied it would be a winner. C. B. Cochran said it was a certain success. George Tyler of America offered to buy the American rights. We had a capital of £10,000, of which I had a fourth, Miss Brayton £1,500. I wanted a capital of £15,000 at least. Carl Leyel said we could get twenty, thirty thousand if we asked for it, but as the production was only costing £6,000, it would be over-capitalized. I was overruled. I was told more capital simply meant dividing the profits between more shares. But I insisted. Carl Leyel said: "All right. I'll be at the theatre at two o'clock to-morrow and we'll get the other £5,000. I know where it is to be had." Next day I was having lunch in my room at the theatre. Lil was there, too. She was against the extra capital. At five minutes to two the telephone-bell rang. Lil answered it. She turned to me. "Leyel is dead. Died suddenly, ten minutes ago, in Rotten Row." He had been in his usual health. He got off his horse, collapsed, and was dead before anyone reached him. We were terribly grieved. I had known Carl right away back in the Benson days, and I think he had been associated with everything I had done. He had been our manager for twenty years. We could not replace him easily. But we managed to secure Mr. Arthur Penley to take up his duties. Again I asked about the extra £5,000. Mr. Penley, after seeing the play rehearsed through, assured me it was not necessary, that we had a big success. A week before we opened I got a warning there was going to be a *bad* first night for us. Well, we opened to a first-night audience. No play, thanks to Cecil Alden's art and Joseph and Phil Harker's painting, has ever been so completely perfect as a production of *The Good Old Days* in England. It was a real slice out of the times. The real cobbled courtyard of the old coaching inn, the huntsman on his white horse, and the members of the hunt in their pink and orange and blue coats, twelve and a half couple of hounds, half a dozen hunters, and the full-blooded life of those days. And yet, as soon as the curtain rose, about a dozen in the pit and a dozen in the gallery, both male and female, started blowing mouth-organs, penny-whistles and squeakers and making other noises. This went on all through the play, through all three acts. This was an organized attack. One critic who gave the show

a good notice, Hannen Swaffer, wondered who had paid these interrupters. William Mollison, in the stalls, turned round and saw a man in the pit blowing some instrument or other, and called out to him. Some of the critics complained of the lack of humour. How was it possible for comedians to fight against this disturbance? Some of the critics complained there was no plot. There was not only a good plot but quite a dramatic one, and sustained to the end. Surely all the people who had read it and backed it and wanted to back it could not be wrong. But start a disturbance in the theatre, and some chicken-hearted critics will be swayed by the booers and write the play down a failure. They are afraid when next they show themselves at a first night they will be picked out by the booers and get the bird. Under the strain the nerves of some of the principals got "slithery" and did not sing or act their best. At the end there were calls for speech. But I wasn't taking any.

The next day the notices in the principal papers talked about another triumph, and so on. Some of the others were luke-warm. But the first week we did quite excellently. In the following week was Armistice Day. One paper, for the first time discovering that by the Armistice we had lost the War, pleaded that people should not go to places of amusement that week. This propaganda had an affect upon the theatres. And the following week Queen Alexandra's lamentable death cast a gloom over the whole land. We had not sufficient money to weather the storm. Had we had that £5,000 I had asked for and which it was now impossible to get, we could have carried on, recast the parts that were weak, and would have run a year. We had done our best to find what those parts required, but in vain. So we were forced to put up the fortnight's notice. And then came from the company the greatest compliment ever paid to a management. The entire company, from highest to lowest, and the heads of departments, wrote to Miss Brayton and myself, offering their services gratis for the next three weeks, which would bring us to Christmas. The letter was signed by all. Unfortunately, we could not take the risk, for the landlord would not help in any way. The landlord was Jimmy White. And so the curtain had to fall. For the last two weeks the comedy went with shouts of laughter. And only the other day I discovered who the organized gang of wreckers were. One of them confessed the whole affair. Now *Cleopatra* had flopped at Daly's, so, having let the Gaiety to us, Jimmy White shifted *Katja the Dancer* from the Gaiety to Daly's. Now the chorus at Daly's had a contract, and so they, male and female, took over the duties of the male and female chorus from the Gaiety. Naturally the Gaiety chorus had a grievance, and voiced it. To appease them, Jimmy White told them he had spoken to Asche, and he would take them on in his new show. Now we had

already engaged our chorus, except two or three, so naturally we could only fill these few remaining vacancies from the unemployed chorus. So the blame was thrown upon me. And therefore many of that chorus whose grievance should have been righted by White came with their sympathizers on my first night, with the intention of getting their own back by wrecking my show. And they succeeded, and so directly caused my bankruptcy. Bless their poor little souls !

After all was over I retired to the farm for Christmas and to think things over. It was not a very cheery Christmas. I knew, if I hung out my stockings on Christmas Eve, they would be filled with demands to redeem promissory notes. Only a miracle could avert disaster. And no miracle came knocking at my door. I got a scrap of comfort. A tour was booked in which Marie Löhr and I starred in a play by William Devereux called *Big Business*. A good play, but not quite right. Still, it played to fair business, but then came the coal strike to kill the theatres, and almost at the same time the sword of Damocles came crashing down. My farm was only occupied by my housekeeper when the receiving order came along. I had some time before had a sale of all live and dead stock, to keep things going. Poor old Facey was dead, thank God, and to save my old friends Countess and Frisky, two Springer spaniels, from the indignity of going to strange homes, for they were getting on in years, I had them put to sleep. Then, in my absence, and with no one to represent me, and without any warning, my farmhouse was raided by the Official Receiver's men. I shall not dwell on this painful business. I had never lived beyond my income, but I had not saved. Had I been paid all that was owing to me, I should have pulled through. My public examination passed off very satisfactorily, and there were no accusations of any kind. My chief creditor was the Inland Revenue. I owed them £40,000, it was stated. But I had paid them many, many thousands for years whenever a demand was made. I paid income- and super-tax, both in Australia and here. At one time, out of every pound due to me from America I received a clear rs. 4d. It is iniquitous to tax men such as artistes, authors, specialists, barristers, as though they were theatre-owners or picture-dealers, family practitioners and solicitors. The former have no goodwill to sell, they cannot pass on their means of livelihood to their children as can the latter. They do not earn *incomes* but *capital*. And they should be taxed on the amount of interest such capital would earn. They are allowed nothing for wear-and-tear of machinery, their brains.

I'll give an instance of how I was taxed. I bought a piece of accommodation land, about six acres, adjoining my farm. This was assessed separately. I was at that time paying 6s. in the pound

income-tax and 5s. in the pound super-tax. And this is the way they assessed me on this six-acre piece of land. They put the rentable value at £2 an acre. For income-tax purposes they doubled this, making it £24 for the six acres :

Super-tax 5s. in the £ on £24	=	£7 14 0
6s. in the £ on £24	=	6 0 0
Total		<u>£13 14 0</u>

Now these six acres have never been let for more than £9 a year in the memory of man. So I was paying a tax of £13 14s. od. on what brought in an income of £9 a year. I had paid £360 for the land, and there were also rates payable on it.

I was sorry to leave the farm. I had lived there for over ten years. I found only three living-rooms there when I bought it. Now it contains, or did when I left it, a dining-room, study, a smoke-room up amongst the beams, a most charming room, bathrooms, etc., two kitchens and seven bedrooms. Some of the country folk around are very amusing. An old carpenter who did a lot of work for me was also an undertaker. When I returned from Australia in '24, I asked him how he was getting on. "Oh, very badly, sir," he replied. "Will you believe it that in the past twelve months I haven't buried a living soul?" Next-door down the hill lived an old fellow, Jesse Workman, in a cottage where his family had, I believe, lived for years. He was about seventy-six to eighty. He had never been farther from home than Stroud, five miles away. In the summer of 1918 he came to me one Sunday morning. "Be there a war on, sir?" he asked. I answered him there was. "Well, I heard nowt about it till last night, in inn. I was told they had no beer. I asked why, and they said : 'Don't 'ee know, Jesse, there be a war on?' So I be come to ask you." Then he wanted to know who we were at war wi'? But what troubled him was beer, or the lack of it. They had just started hay-making in my fields. He generally was one of the haymakers. "I make no haymaking without beer," he growled. I asked him if he would like some Moselle cup. "Wot be that?" he inquired. I told him it was a superior cider. He would try it. So I went into the house and filled a 1-litre pewter pot with some champagne that had been left the night before, adding some cocktail mixture and ice. This I took out to the old fellow. He smacked his lips over it. "There be no cider like he in inn." The last sight I had of him, as I drove off with my party for London, was sitting under one of last year's ricks, sound asleep. The next Sunday Mrs. Workman came to me. "Don't 'ee be givin' my Jesse any more of 'ee cider. 'E done no work all week." So when Jesse came along and asked for another mug of cider, I had to refuse him.

There was an old sport there, one Nat Walkley. He sometimes did a bit of work for me. All during the hunting season he would follow the hunt on foot, the Dukes and Berkeleys. He knew every inch of the country, every covert and, I believe, every fox. He never missed a meet. He showed me a half-crown the Prince of Wales had given him. It was a wonderful sight to stand on my balcony and watch the hunt streaming by over the stone walls and away over the brow of the hill. Sometimes there was pretty good rough shooting over the farm and adjacent fields. The Springers were good gun dogs and I would go out in the early morning and come back with a small mixed bag, a brace of partridges and a cock pheasant, which the dogs had flushed out of a hedge. There were no rabbits, but a few hares, which, however, I never shot. I have shot a few snipe, and also a few duck. I used to hatch and rear quite a number of turkeys, killing sometimes as many as fifty at Christmas to give as presents to my friends and to members of the staff at His Majesty's Theatre. On my return from Australia, however, I used to sell them to any friend who wanted a well-fed bird. The heaviest I ever reared was 45 lbs. I sold him to a butcher for show in his window. The largest I ever killed for my own purposes and cooked was 38 lbs. I had a flock of geese, about thirty in number, and a couple of hundred ducks and four or five hundred other poultry. It did not pay, of course, because I gave most of the produce away. With my bankruptcy all this came to an end, and although later on I was able to take up my residence again, I only stayed a few months. Things did not taste the same. I had no car, no dogs. And so eventually I left, and save for a few days when I went up to see about some more kennels being built for a company who had taken it over and appointed me manager of a dog-breeding concern, I never have seen it since. I went to the little knoll where my old Facey sleeps. She had never seen her master down. But it would not have made any difference to her. Unlike human beings, riches or poverty make no difference in dogs' affections.

The last time I was at the farm, save for three rooms, the place was bare of furniture. It was like a morgue. Kennels for two hundred and fifty dogs housed here and there a pig. The cookhouse and the dogs' hospital housed cobwebs. Desolation was everywhere. I remembered the first time I went down there to stay. It was on Christmas Eve, 1915. There were measles at home and so I took my young nephew down. It was a white Christmas. I had sent turkey and plum pudding and everything on before, with directions to the woman who was looking after the place. We arrived about dusk. The roads were covered with ice, and the hills approaching the farm are very hilly, about 1 in 4. So the last mile and a half we had to walk it with our bags. And that mile and a half took us about

an hour, up a steep hill all the way, and many falls. There was only candlelight at the farm. The first thing that happened was the old woman, having put a candle in our bedroom, falling downstairs and cutting her head badly. It was two miles to the doctor, so Tony (my nephew) and young White, my greyhound-trainer, had to help her down two miles to the nearest doctor's. After they had been gone some time, I smelt something burning. It was in the kitchen. And, moreover, in the oven. It was the turkey, burnt to a beautiful blackbird. She had cooked it for to-night instead of to-morrow. It was ruined. And nothing for Christmas Day. Tony eventually arrived back. The old woman had been attended to and taken home. We had a lively prospect in front of us. And it was bitterly cold. "Back home, Tony, measles or no measles." There was no telephone in the house. So we sent White to order a cab at the hotel in Nailsworth to take us the four miles or so to Stroud. We pack our bags again and followed. We tobogganed most of the way down the hill on our bags, having many smashes into the hedges during our progress. We caught a very cold train to London and eventually reached home in St. John's Wood about 1 a.m. Mrs. Measles (Lil) was asleep. So were the servants. We foraged and found and fed before a crackling wood fire, and afterwards a hot rum punch of my own particular brewing and a good cigar made us forget the troubles of the day. That was the first Christmas at the farm. But many a pleasant one I had there afterwards. I said good-bye to the farm with the same feelings as I had done nearly forty years ago to my cave by the sea. Although it had lost its attraction for me, it had been, as the cave, absolutely my own, my very own. The cave had cost me nothing. This farm had cost me a fortune, a big fortune. From first to last, directly and indirectly, I had spent, at least so my pass-book told me, £100,000 on and through it. And when I left I could not put my hand on anything there and say, *This is mine!*

So I had to start all over again. I tried a play: *What Shall It Profit a Man!* a strong play with a fine part for a woman and me. And it created enthusiasm. But although I had provisionally booked a tour for it, I had to cancel it, as something else was promised me which did not materialize. Then began a struggle to keep going. I am not going into that, for the struggle is still on, and I have not given in yet. Month followed month. I made my next London appearance in a stupid farce, *Who's Who?* at the Vaudeville. It ran five nights! It deserved five years' hard.

Then I was engaged to appear in *Marjolaine* at the Gaiety. On the second day of rehearsals, owing to a broken step I fell head-first—a drop of ten feet—on to my shoulder, on the stone landing below, and badly dislocated my arm and shoulder. I was rushed off

in a taxi to Dr. Cecil Webb-Johnson who succeeded in reducing the dislocation. For weeks I had to rehearse a play with my arm in a sling. This musical comedy was milk-and-water stuff, and my part I had to write up myself. A very nice American, Oscar Eagle, produced it. It was the first time for twenty-five years I had been produced. Oscar Eagle was a gentleman, but his knowledge of England and history was, as my old dresser would have put it, "vogue". The period of the play was 1807, Chiswick way. One of the first lines I had to speak was "The gasman's gone to meet her". I, in all humility, asked the meaning of the line. "Well, Mr. Asche, it's just a play on the words—the gasman's gone to meet her—meter. You see?" "Oh, yes," I replied. "I see the pun, but in 1807 we had *no gas*." "No gas!" exclaimed the American. "Then how did you light *your* streets?" "With oil lamps or by aid of link-men," I replied, adding, "*You* had no streets to light." It was doomed from the first. It was dull and stupid. I wonder if people in 1807 were so dreadfully uninteresting and pedantic. Anyhow, it was no food or drink for your cocktail-drinking, flat-chested, cigarette-eating flapper of 1928, nor did it appeal to the permanent-waved, powdered, perfumed and rouged she-youth either. And so after a few weeks' run it came off. That was in the summer of 1928. And now I have a play that I have been trying to find backing for for two years. It is laid in China and Java, and is a better play than *Kismet*, in my opinion. And my opinion has only been at fault for once in twenty-two years. When it is done, I think the public will endorse my *views*. I think the public is growing tired of these restless, noisy, musical comedies from America. The hideous American voice is surely getting on the delicate nerves of the ear. Beauty and grace and melody may one day replace brutishness, angularity and nigger noise.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Sport and Stories of Men

SPORT of every kind, either as spectator or participator, has always been a passion with me. Jack of all trades and master of none, perhaps. Still I have boxed, wrestled, gone in for weight-lifting, played cricket, football under three codes, Rugby, Soccer and Australian rules, hockey, water-polo, golf, shooting, trout and salmon fishing, squash tennis and lawn tennis, Badminton, fencing and high jumping. At boxing, swimming and water-polo I was best, but all these games kept me fit for many years, but assisted in putting on weight later on. I have already mentioned my devotion to coursing and its resultant losses. Fond as I was of cricket, I was too impetuous to be a reliable bat and preferred wicket-keeping. Including the first test match in Australia, which I was taken to as a child, I have witnessed something like forty test matches in England and Australia. My first vivid recollection of cricket was in 1883 and '84, when the Hon. Ivor Bligh's team visited Australia. I remember Victoria beating this team, I think, by 8 wickets. Victoria had a lob bowler, Cooper, who did great execution, but was a dire failure in England later. Jack Blackham was the wicket-keeper, always standing close up to the fastest bowling and doing away with a long stop for, I understand, the first time. He was the prince of keepers, though some place Pilling as high. I never saw him. Blackham in those days wore just the old-fashioned brown leather keeping gloves, no under-gloves or beef-steak. Every half-hour or so he would soak these gloves in water, wring them out and put them on again. He would take a ball fairly wide on the leg side with one hand and remove the leg back without moving his body or head to leg. I have seen him scores of times. And only once have I seen anyone to equal him, and that was when Mr. Martyn kept at Lords in a Gents and Players match, when he stood close up to Walter Brearley at one end and Knox at the other, for an hour or more. Others to fast bowling have been merely glorified and well-padded long stops.

I tried to emulate Blackham during the many years I kept wicket and many were the penalties I paid in so doing. I have had my left eye cut open three times, my lips cut and fingers smashed,

and, like John Falstaff, have been beaten all the colours of the rainbow. Whenever I think of cricket it is always the black-bearded, crouching figure of Jack Blackham taking the ball close to the wicket and returning it to the bowler full pitch before he has stopped his run up the pitch. There is a lot, perhaps, to be said for the wicket-keeper standing back to fast bowling. He makes catches which would probably pass him close up. But would not slip or fine leg collect them? And by keeping close up he forces the batsman to stand in his ground and not a foot out or so, as is often the case otherwise. Of all grounds I would sooner watch a test match from the pavilion at Lords than anywhere else. At Lords you are right behind the bowler and the wicket seems closer to you. When we were at school at the Melbourne Grammar, we used to follow the fortunes of Murdoch's '82 and '84 team with great keenness. Murdoch, who was originally a wicket-keeper, had a fine quartet of bowlers under him: Spofforth, Palmer, Boyle and Garrett, with George Giffen also to fall back on. Spofforth was perhaps about the finest bowler that ever was. He was very brainy and would always examine the wicket thoroughly before choosing his end. And he knew exactly what sort of ball the turf would take. Murdock told me a good story of Spofforth, who never attempted to hide his light under a bushel. He had done a fine bit of bowling on some Yorkshire ground, Leeds or Sheffield, taking 7 for 30 or thereabouts. After the day's play, he was in the bar and he frankly confessed that he was the finest bowler the world had ever seen. Those present began to pull his leg and suggest others as his superiors. Shaw, etc., etc. "No," said Spoff, "I am the finest bowler the world has ever seen." At that moment George Ullyet entered the bar. "Well," said Spoff, "I'll leave it to George." "What's that, laddie?" asked George. "Am I not the finest bowler you ever saw?" asked Spoff. George looked at Spofforth for a minute, and then said: "I don't know about you being the finest bowler I ever saw, but you're the ugliest — I ever saw." Which was not far from the truth. In 1885 or 1886, I saw Aubrey Smith as captain of an English side. That was also on the Melbourne Ground. I believe there were two separate teams out at the same time. I little thought then that years later I should be playing on the same side as Aubrey Smith. But we did. He was for years captain of the Thespids and he and I at least a couple of times made a big stand together. I had one funny experience with Aubrey. We were playing, I think, at Tottenham. We had got the other side out and I think I went in fourth wicket, the score being about twenty. Aubrey advised me to play steadily and no short runs. He had strike. He played the ball past me to mid-on and called me for a run. Then he shouted "*No*". But the ball was in the bowler's hands, and I was half-way up the pitch. I continued my walk to the

pavilion, which was Aubrey's end. The bowler had not broken the wicket. He had exclaimed: "Hard luck!" and was just tossing the ball up in the air and catching it. Most of the fieldsmen had thrown themselves down on the turf. Suddenly I was conscious of the fact that Aubrey was running down the pitch to cross me, sacrificing his wicket as he was to blame. The bowler also noticed it, and the ball was up in the air. When he caught it, instead of reaching out his hand and removing a bail, he threw at the wicket, missed it, and the ball went past the recumbent fieldsmen to the boundary, and Aubrey and I stayed in the rest of the afternoon.

Whenever an Australian eleven was on a visit to this country I used to follow them from match to match throughout our summer vacation. I suppose I never saw W. G. Grace at his best, but what I saw was the best I saw. Of other batsmen Trumper and Ranji stand out together. I remember Ranji's 150 not out in the test match at Manchester against Harry Trott's team. Jones was making them bump face high, but the Prince just brushed them off his face with his bat, as one would a soft ball with a racket, and the ball sped through the net of fieldsmen on the by-side to the boundary. Then there were Trumper's 130 at Lord's on his first trip and later at Lord's, when he lifted the first ball off Haigh to the scoreboard; and his century before lunch at Leeds. But Charlie McCartney's 345 in under four hours against Notts in 1921 was, I think, the fastest scoring for a big score I have ever seen. One spectator described it as monotonous. Also his century before lunch, Leeds, '26. Archie McClaren and Jack Hobbs can scarcely be separated from the above. Australian batting has certainly lost in brilliance, McCartney being the last of them. Kippax, when I saw him out there in 1923, was the nearest approach to Trumper I have seen, but McCartney told me here last season at Lords he has copied the slow coaches. For hitting performances I recall Jack Lyons's 140 in an hour and a quarter at Lord's against a strong M.C.C. team, after following on. He was the finest fast-footed hitter I ever remember. And Jessop! What would we give now for half an hour of his fireworks to entrance the spectator and set an example to some of these dull pros. Mention of Jessop reminds me of an incident. He, Hesketh Prichard and myself were playing for the M.C.C. against Chiswick House. We had alighted from our taxi at the Park gate and walked up the avenue. We did not know where the cricket-ground was. We saw a lady cutting some roses. We all three approached her and took off our hats. "Can you tell us the way to the cricket-ground?" asked one of us. She turned: "I am the Queen of Jericho, and I command you not to go to the cricket-ground!" We again took off our hats, and walked away and found it without venturing to ask again. It was, of course, a private asylum. Whilst

I was batting one of the bowlers on the fast side kept slinging them down on my legs. Several times he left a lovely bruise, and sometimes I managed to get my bat there, and off he went for four. Each time I did this he seemed to me to bowl more violently on the leg. So as over was called, I asked Tewke, who was Captain and also the head of the asylum: "Is that man dangerous?" meaning the bowler. "Oh, dear no," said Tewke. "He's one of the doctors." But I never cared for these matches. You never knew who were sane and who were not. At Virginia Water I happened to catch *The King of England* out, and he had quite an argument about it with me. He threatened me with the stocks, with the block. I was glad when the umpire took him by the arm and led him off.

When I was elected a member of the M.C.C. I played quite a lot of cricket, and the two-day matches against the minor counties were most enjoyable. I never missed a day, unless wet, at the nets. Living next door, I used to have an hour's squash rackets and then an hour at the nets, a nice cold bath, and sit on the top of the pavilion the rest of the day, watching the game in the middle.

I must confess I prefer to watch a Test Match over here. There is much more spirit about the game. Those long-distance matches in Australia have rubbed off the brilliance from Australian batting. A Jack Lyons or George Bonnor or Percy Macdonald would find it difficult to get into an Australian test eleven nowadays. The stodgy batting of Woodfull, the world's best worst batsman, Ponsford, who funks fast bowling, and others such as Kellaway, are most wearisome to watch. Even the once brilliant Kippax has been toned down. "Those who touch pitch," etc.

Here is a story illustrating what a difference success and failure make as to the esteem in which one is held by one's fellows. I was playing either for Warwickshire Gents or Stratford-on-Avon against Bournemouth. We had got the home side out cheaply for about 70 runs. George Arlington, who used to play for Sussex, and I opened the innings. Now George was a very big hitter and I also could lay on the wood. George said to me, as we walked to the wicket: "We'll play County cricket; take our time, and have a bit of fun." On the home side there was a bowler who had done some wondrous feats, winning some Sunday paper's first prize for bowling feats for about three weeks in succession. I think he had an average of four runs per wicket, or something terrifying. We had heard all about it in the pavilion, and we noticed the reception he had when he stepped out on to the field. The captain had led his other nine men out, and they formed an avenue through which Mr. Spofforth Turner Lockwood Richardson walked. They seemed to bow to him, and the captain almost kissed him. Mr. Lohman Peel Alberto Trott smiled a disdainful smile and walked to the wicket to take choice

of ends. At last he made up his mind. He measured his run and examined the ball, and the captain placed the field, but Mr. Shaw Peat Attewell replaced it, bringing in long-on to short mid-wicket and moving all the field close in. Then he bowled, and George, acting the goat, just kept it out of the wicket. He kept on flattering the bowling and Mr. Armstrong Trumble Gregory bowled maiden after maiden. I at the other end collected a fluky brace. At the end of half an hour that two was the only score on the tins. Then I saw a twinkle in Arlington's eye. And the prize bowler's first ball was out of the field for six. The next one went to leg for four, followed by two drives for six and a flash past cover for four. I got a boundary. We were not running odd runs. George wanted to tame the lion himself. The next over the captain, still polite, suggested three men in the country. The champion conceded two. And George collected four sixes and two fours. The next time the great man, beginning to show a little white under the tan, had four men out, but George hit every ball either over or to the boundary.

And then came *the fall*. As over was called and as the captain was coming over close to me, the bowler of bowlers whispered in his ear: "I'll have another man out next over." The captain looked him straight in the eye and in a loud voice said: "You b——y well won't. *You come off!*" I have seen some suffering in my lifetime. I have seen the dazed look on a man's face as he is knocked out, but never shall I forget the agony on that poor man's face.

My first game of golf was played over the public links on the Braid Hills, Edinburgh. About the same time, Benson took it up. But it did not appeal to him. The only time I saw him playing on the Braids, he would, after hitting the ball, run after it like a stag, and as it was rolling down the hills, he would hit it as though it were hockey or polo. He never took any heed of his opponent. He never saw him after the first tee shot. Round the course he chased the ball, with only one club, passing sedate old players who thought a madman had escaped. On the green he would dribble the ball into the hole—he only carried a cleek—and off he would hit it again. One would catch glimpses of him doing the round on some distant hill, his long hair waving in the wind, running up hill and down dale, hitting, kicking the little gutty ball along, whilst players stood gazing in astonishment. As he rushed past a couple of players on the fairway, or dribbled his ball on to the green, the while two players were studying the line of their putts, he would just call to them in his cheery way: "Sorry, hope I'm not getting in your way," and before they could recover speech, he was a hurtling figure in the distance. At the theatre that night he would say: "I had a jolly game of golf this morning." "What did you go round in, sir?"

one would ask. "Oh," he would reply, "about twenty-seven or twenty-eight *minutes*."

The first time I played over St. Andrews I played by myself. I had motored over from Dundee, just to be able to say I had played the famous course. Of course I had to wait a terrible time before I could drive off. I had a dour-looking white-whiskered caddy. On the first tee I asked for my cleek. He handed me my driver, which I had been off for some time, remarking: "Ye're not allowed to drive off the tee with an *irron* club." Anyhow, I got a good straight drive in and he remarked: "Good shot." I foozled my second and my third and took seven for the hole. And I took seven for the second. The old blighter never said a word. He would just hand me out the club *he* chose, not what I wanted. Now I was in those days playing on a 5 handicap, and after another hole or so I got on to my game. After playing four successive holes in one under bogey, I was rather pleased with myself and remarked cheerily to the old fellow: "Well, I suppose you have worse golfers than myself up here occasionally?" He did not answer, and we walked on in silence a few yards. Thinking he was perhaps hard of hearing, I raised my voice. "I said I suppose you have worse golfers than myself up here occasionally." "I heard vera well what you said," he replied. "I was thinking!"

In the afternoon I had a match, and was doing a really good round, keeping a count, when I got into a hazard and took three with my niblick to get out, which of course would spoil my card. "Blank blank it," I cursed, and handed him my niblick. "Put the blankety club back in the blankety-blank bag." "There's no necessity," he remarked, as he waved the club aside: "ye'll need it: ye're in the ither side." And I was.

Old Fred Billington of D'Oyley Carte fame was a most enthusiastic golfer, and about this time we happened to be staying at the Braids Hotel, Edinburgh, together. So we played every day at Moreton Hall. He would not take any strokes from me, so I beat him pretty badly every time. It was at Moreton Hall, by the way, that I holed out in one for the first, and, I am sure, the last time in my life. And that was at the eighteenth hole 285 yards, with a most difficult and long carry. It is still pointed out to visitors as the hole Oscar Asche did in one. But to return to Billington, or "Billy", as he was affectionately known. He challenged me to a game for a fiver on Sunday, to be played at a club some little distance away. I forget the name. Barnton, or Barry—I know it was something like that. Billy provided the carriage and pair—no taxis in those days—and we arrived. It was a beautiful warm May morning. The first note of tragedy was struck when Billy discovered that no caddies were allowed on the Sabbath. Now Billy hated teeing up, because the blood rushed to his head. As there were no caddies, he gave the

chman, half-a-crown and the promise of another, to carry his round and tee up. To Billy's delight the man was a golfer himself. I, of course, carried for myself. We had gone two holes when the second note of tragedy struck. An official came out to inform Billy that *no one* was allowed to caddy for a player on the Sabbath. Billy told that official in language slightly warmer than that May morning what he thought of such a rule. Still, the coachee had to leave us. I gave Billy a bad beating, though I teed up for him. He paid me the fiver and we went in to lunch. Old Billy, as his many thousands of friends will remember, was an excellent trencherman. He was grumpy, and his appetite was always at its best when he was grumpy. He ate in defiance. Roast fowl was on the menu. We both ordered fowl. To Billy came a wing and breast. To me a leg, as asked for. "What is the use of this to me?" said Billy. "Bring me a fowl, a roast fowl." The waiter hesitated. Billy repeated his order, and the waiter went off. Then we ordered drinks. I had a large whisky-and-polly, Billy a large bottle of Chambertin, 30s., "with the chill off, waiter," as the waiter arrived with a roast fowl, almost a Surrey capon, fully 5 lbs. when cooked. This he placed before Billy. "Haven't you got any sausages with it, and some more bacon," ordered Billy, and presently came a relay of sausages and many curls of bacon. "Why don't you order one, Oscar?" he said. "Don't be silly. A leg is no good to you." I went on to cheese. There was nothing left of that roast fowl, not a scrap, nor even a skin of a sausage nor a chip of the bacon. And another bottle of Chambertin with the chill off had assisted the other bottle to wash down the bird and side goods, with a dishful of spring greens and a large cauliflower. "And now," said Billy, "some apple pie—not a lady's portion—and some cheese and cream, Yorkshire fashion." For this piled-up dish he ordered a large bottle of port, 15s. a bottle. "They don't know how to feed you here," he remarked, as the table was cleared. "Now at St. Anne's in Blackpool, they give you a good lunch and plenty of it." He now, fortified with lunch, challenged me to another round. "I'll play you for a sovereign a hole, Oscar, each of us to play with only one club, to be named now. I'll play my driving mashie." I thought for a moment. "Are you allowed to tee up?" I asked, knowing this would hit him. "Tee up be —," he replied. "Can I tee up?" I repeated. "Tee up whenever you like," he answered. "Oh, well, if I can tee up when I like, I'll play my putter." "Damned fool," was his comment, and stalked out of the room and on to the first tee, with his driving mashie. I followed with my wry-necked putter. Although it was my honour, Billy took it and drove a ball straight down the fairway. I made a high tee and with my putter was about fifty yards short of him. He walked away. Then, as I did not immediately follow, he stopped and turned

round. "What the devil are you loafing behind for?" "Filling my pockets with sand," I replied. And presently I joined him, both side-pockets bulging with sand. Arrived at my ball, I lifted it and teed it up a couple of inches high, and welted it along a good hundred and twenty yards or so. Billy's second found some sand bunker, and so did my third. Billy took three shots with his driving mashie to get out, I built, as allowed by the agreement, a tee like a young sand-castle, placed the ball on top, popped it on to the green, and was down in five. Billy on the green in six. And so it went on. Wherever I found my ball I would take my time and build a tee to suit the occasion. Naturally, when I holed out in the sixth green I was 6 up. Billy put his hand in his pocket and pulled out some money and counted out six golden sovereigns. "Here you are," he said. "What's this for?" I asked. "I've had enough," he said. "I haven't," I answered back. "The match is £1 a hole for 18 holes. If you give up now, I want another £12." So he handed me a further twelve pounds. And off he walked to the clubhouse. I followed. When I joined him, he was consuming another bottle of port. He wouldn't speak to me. "Don't be silly, Billy," I said to him. "Here's your eighteen pounds, but perhaps it will teach you not to make idiotic bets in the future. Why, any kid would have beaten you." At last I persuaded him to take the money back, and then he had a good laugh. But he was always doing similar absurd things.

There is a very good story told of Billington when he was golfing somewhere on the South coast. I think it was at Dover. Anyhow, there is a chalk-pit there, over which you have to drive from one of the tees. There is a local rule that no player must drive if there happens to be any player in this chalk-pit. Billy was playing the course for the first time, with a member of the club, whom he only knew slightly. They came to the chalk-pit. It was Billy's honour. He was about to drive, when his attention was called to the local rule and to the fact that there was a player in the pit. So Billy waited. And he still waited. The player in the pit was a patient, persistent parson. Billy counted thirteen niblick shots in a vain attempt to reach the tableland. Bruce and the spider. At last Billy could wait no longer. After all, it was only a mashie shot across. So he called "Fore!" and topped his ball, which went skimming past the parson's ear in the chalk-pit just as he was about to play his fifteenth shot. He turned to see who had offended the rule. He saw Billy's massive proportions struggling down to join him in the pit. As he came within earshot, the parson told him in polite but plain language what he thought of him as a golfer, as a gentleman and as an individual. Billy heard, but could not speak and do a goat-like ascent at the same time. When he had reached rock bottom, he paused and got his breath, and when the parson

had finished with a most cutting peroration, Billy replied. I regret I can but give his reply in a bowdlerized version, but those who knew him, and others who don't remember this white-haired, red-faced huge Yorkshireman but who have imagination, will be able to fill in the missing words.

He began: "I do not object to the Sermon on the Mount of Olives, *but* I'll be ——— if I will listen to a ——— lesson from a—— parson in a ——— ——— chalk-pit."

When Billy and his opponent had finished their game and returned to the clubhouse, the parson, who had given up the round on Billy's outburst, was still writing pages in the Complaint Book.

At Aberdeen, where I was appearing with Tree's Shakespearean company, I played four rounds and nine holes over Blairgowrie, I think the course is called. That night I played Sir John Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and I was so tired when I got back to my digs, I went to bed and to sleep with my clothes on. The most curious match I played was against Robert Evett at the old Acton course. He was dormy nine on me at the turn, but I came home in 32, winning every hole, and thus squared the game.

The Stage Golfing Society, which was founded by the late George Edwardes, and which has for many years been run by a wonderful organizer and secretary, Ernest Graham, includes nearly every golfing actor in Great Britain. Its annual dinner and dance has been honoured by the presence of many of the most celebrated men in the kingdom. This society was one of my hobbies, and many were the pleasant times I spent with fellow members. Another hobby of mine was, and is, the Green Room Club, certainly the best Bohemian club in London. It has included in its list of members practically every well-known member of the profession. A book could be written consisting of stories and personalities of its members. One outstanding character was the late Charles Read, who was organist at the Lyceum Theatre under Sir Henry Irving's management. Alas, many of the stories connected with him, and many of his sayings, cannot be published. A couple of jokes in which he played a part may amuse. At the old Green Room Club in Bedford Street there entered one night, at supper-time, Fred Terry and the late Lionel Monckton. As they passed by the stewards' room, they noticed a huge and most appetizing haddock about to be served up. "By Jove," said Fred, "that looks good. I think we'll have one of those, Lal." "Sorry, sir," said the steward, "we have not one left. This is for Mr. Read." "All right," said Fred; "take it in." Fred, Lionel and the haddock all arrived simultaneously at the head of the table where Charles Read sat, serviette tucked under chin, iron-grey moustache curling up with bristling anticipation, preparing sauces, condiments and seasoning for his dish. Salutations

were exchanged, and then Fred Terry, in a lower-pitched voice began to speak confidentially about some new play he was about to produce, and about the music Monckton was to write for it. Read pricked up his ears. This was news, and he must hear it, so let the haddock wait awhile. Fred Terry stopped suddenly in his speech. "What a terrible smell there is in this club," said he. "Nearly always the same," said Monckton. "Drains." "No, damn it, this is no *drain*. This is something rotten." Then he turned to Read. "Can't you smell it, Charles?" Read sniffed. "No, can't say I notice anything." "Got a cold perhaps?" commented Fred. "Well, Lal," continued he, "about the incidental music of the First Act— Oh, really, this is too terrible. Whatever can it be?" Then he looked at the large haddock in front of Read. "Quite sure that haddock's all right, Charles?" Charles smelt it. "Quite all right." Fred hesitated. "Do you mind if I smell it?" "No," said Read. Fred lifted the dish to his nose, turned his head away, and put the dish back. "Come to the other end of the room, Lal," said he. "What do you mean?" blurted Read. "Do you mean to say it's not fresh?" "My dear Charles," said Fred, "in his most ingratiating manner, *you* have to eat it, and if *you* are satisfied, well—" Read lifted the dish again to his nose. "My —, you are right. It stinks. Robert! Robert!"—and the steward appeared. "Take this stinking haddock away and bring me the supper-card." And at the other end of the table, Terry and Monckton sat down and supped off the discarded dish. "Really the most delicious haddock I have ever tasted, Lionel."

Another supper story happened at the Green Room Club when we were rehearsing *Richard II* with Tree. I had had a long evening of it and sat down next to Read and ordered a steak. He advised me not to have a steak. Too heavy at that time of night. "Why not have sausages?" he suggested. "Because I want a steak, Charles, and I do not like sausages." "Ah, but the sausages you get in this club are not like ordinary sausages. Try them. *I've* ordered some." "Thank you, no, Charles—you never know what sausages are made of." "Don't be damned rude," he exploded. "The sausages you get here are English, made of the very best material, not like the German muck!" "All the same, Charles, I prefer steak. You can never trust any sausage." "Oh, for the Lord's sake don't be so — absurd," he answered. "The sausages here—" "Oh, damn your sausages here. *You* eat them, if you like, but I'm having steak." "Well, I'm having sausages," said Read. "You're welcome," I snapped, and the conversation stopped.

As he was fixing his place with every sauce within reach I went into the steward's room. Read's sausages had just come down on the service-lift. "Half a moment, Robert," I said to the steward, and taking a knife I made a slit up the end of one sausage and pushed

a trousers-button well up the middle. "Take them in after I'm back in my seat," I said. And in came Robert and laid the two brown bursting bladders of mystery before the great gourmet.

"Ah," said Charles, "these are what one can call sausages." I said nothing. "Oh, for ——'s sake don't sulk, Oscar," said Charles, putting in one-third of the first sausage into his mouth. "Absolutely delicious," was his criticism. "You never know what is in a sausage, as I said before," I remarked. "Oh, don't get so —— irritating. I tell you these sausages——" and he put the middle third into his mouth and his teeth closed on something hard. He stopped talking, chewed the mouthful like a rabbit with his front teeth, and then took from his lips the trouser-button. He looked at it, and his old red face turned white. "My—! Robert! Robert, where the —— did these sausages come from?" "The usual place," answered Robert. "Ever heard of Sweeney Todd?" I asked, but Charles simply raved up and down the room, exclaiming: "Last time I ever eat sausages in this *damned* club."

The late Charles Somerset was a most amusing and popular member of the Club. He had a most vivid imagination and would keep his audience spellbound. He was telling us once his horrible experiences in the Franco-Prussian war. He was fighting for France. He told us of the hardships, of the lack of food and clothing. How badly the soldiers were shod. Then he described a long night-march his lot had. "Our feet were raw, yet we had to trudge on, mile after mile, through knee-deep snow, and at dawn we entered into action—the battle of ——" "But that was in July," said one of his listeners, after a pause. "Yes, July, laddie," said Charles, never at a loss. "The coldest July Europe has ever experienced." He used to punctuate and point his stories with a dry cigarette cough. Only once was he ever seen to heave a meal at the Club. I was present, with others, when this strange event happened. He had ordered haricot ox-tail, and it was not quite done, and the pieces of tail simply bolted hither and thither whenever he tried to seize a piece between knife and fork. They skidded off the plate, left and right and forwards on to the table-cloth, only to be herded back. For half an hour Charles patiently endeavoured to secure a forkful of meat, but the feat could only have been accomplished by means of a wicker-keeper's glove and a corkscrew. When at length he asked the waitress to clear, the tailpieces were still defiantly intact but the tablecloth resembled a map of a battlefield. He and Courtice Pounds were relating to Tree one night, in the Club, how they, with some other members of the theatrical profession, formed a rowing-club, and how they had gone out their first Sunday in an eight-oar "sliding-seats", "out-riggers", etc., etc. "Courtice Pounds wore cricket flannels and a straw decker," said Somerset. "And Charlie,"

replied Pounds, "wore nothing but an old blue bathing-suit." Then in turn each of them related the difficulties. They had started down-stream and had managed to get along somehow or other. But it was on their return journey against the tide that discussions started. Some of the crew refused to row, because the fellow behind kept on prodding him in the back. Like unskilful singers, they kept no time. After half an hour's struggling and argument, they discovered they were a couple of miles farther down-stream. At last they decided to row to the shore to a friendly boathouse. There the crew landed, and, leaving their racer to be sent for, they started to walk back to their boathouse, about five miles distant. Of course it was Charles Somerset in his bathing costume that drew the attention of the crowd. Women standing in their doorways called him a disgusting old man. "And the children started throwing horse muck at him," continued Pounds. It was all imagination. There had never been a rowing-club, nor a Sunday outing. But the two Charlies could persuade anyone it was true. On the day of the funeral of our dear old friend Fred Mouillot, Charlie Somerset, who had attended the funeral, was sitting in the Club, telling several of us who had not been able to be present about the ceremony, etc. A fussy little member who blew in and was a listener remarked: "Poor Fred, I sent him a wreath. Did you see it, Charlie?" "Yes," replied Charlie, "I saw it." Some other members joined in and the fussy little member, wanting everyone to know he had sent a wreath, kept on repeating the question: "Did you see my wreath, Charlie?" until at length Charlie could stand it no longer. "Did I see it?" said he. "He was *wearing* it!"

Dear old Lionel Brough, or Daddy, as we used to call him, had a wonderful fund of stories, which he used to tell inimitably. But he got most annoyed if anyone happened to tell one of his stories in his presence. I remember when we were playing with Tree in Dublin, we were all invited out by him (Tree) to a picnic to some waterfalls which we had to reach by train and then jaunting-cars. Courtice Pounds had a joke with Daddy. He so arranged that Brough should share the car with three other male members of the company, one of whom Brough disliked. So Pounds gave this particular passenger the headings and salient points of as many of Brough's well-known stories as would last the half-hour or so drive. Courtice Pounds, Tree, Maud Jeffries and myself followed immediately behind. Of course, we could hear nothing, but we could tell by Brough's attitude and gestures and the general ensemble of the car that the joke was working. When we reached the waterfall and dismounted, Brough came over to us in a deuce of a paddy. *He* was not going back in the same car. *He* wasn't going to drive with that damned fellow who pinched his stories and had never let

TOWN HALL, MELBOURNE

Thursday, July 3rd, 1924

Farewell Luncheon

— TO —



OSCAR ASCHE

PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FOR ENGLAND.

"He was a man, take him for all and all,
I shall not look upon his like again."

Hamlet

"Speak of me as I am."

Othello

PHOTOGRAPH OF MENU CARD FOR FAREWELL LUNCHEON PRIOR TO HIS
DEPARTURE FROM MELBOURNE TO ENGLAND

him get a word in edgeways. Charlie Pounds promised to arrange it differently. Pounds would make one of his fellow passengers. Before we started back Pounds had a few words with the jarvie, who was quite intelligent. He was given the following instructions. Whenever the old gentleman who would be sitting next to him offered to tell him a story, he was to listen, but never to smile, and when the point of a story had been disclosed, he was to ask in quite an interested manner: "*And then ?*" He was given half-a-crown, with a promise of it being doubled if he kept to the bargain. The driver started. On the other side of the car Pounds had arranged for two of the young extra girls to sit. Charlie sat at the tail end next to Brough, who was next to the jarvie. Brough at first chatted with the two girls, but evidently found them unsuitable ground on which to plant his stories. He turned to Pounds. He was fast asleep, apparently. He took a critical look at the jarvie, made some remark obviously about the weather or the countryside, and then hunched himself up close to him, as a man does when he is going to be confidential. We saw the jarvie listen. We could see the confident poise of Brough's head as his lips stopped moving, a movement of the jarvie's lips, and then further explanatory gestures and speech from Daddy, and then complete stagnation. After a pause, he obviously tried another story, with similar results. When we arrived at the hotel and were sitting down to dinner, Brough entered and came across to join Tree, Maud Jeffries, Pounds and myself. As soon as he got within earshot Tree said: "What I like about these Irish people is their wonderful sense of humour." "Sense of humour be damned!" cried Brough. "I think they are the most ignorant lot of — I have ever met."

During the same visit to Dublin, and a few evenings later, we were entertained by, I think, the Arts Club there. Brough came in rather late. Several good stories had already been told across the board before his arrival. Naturally he was called upon at once. He told No. 1 story, which, after a slight pause, evoked much laughter and applause. "That went very well," he whispered to Pounds, and he got up on his feet again and told No. 2. That went even better, and so he told No. 3. This absolutely broke up the table. Brough was puzzled, and turned to Pounds, who was shedding tears of laughter. "Well, I've never known those three stories go so well before. I can't understand it." "You'd understand well enough had you been here a little earlier, for that gentleman"—went on Pounds, pointing to Mr. Upton—"told those same three stories, and in the same identical order."

Another great character was the late William Blakeley. He was very fond of a game of nap. Entering the card-room one day at the Club, where a particularly warm game of poker was under

way, he stood behind Fred Terry's chair. A jack pot had been opened and raised, cards drawn, and Fred had raised and was, waiting for his opponents to make up their minds. They were hesitating. Seeing Fred's cards and misunderstanding the pause, he exclaimed: "Four aces and a King! I should go *nap!*"

I think the first time I ever entered the portals of the Garrick Club was one Saturday evening, as the late Henry Kemble's guest. Courtice Pounds was also his guest. We all three were playing with Tree in *Ulysses*. When we entered the dining-room the long table was very full with all the crowned heads, so to speak, and Pounds and I felt very shy and uncomfortable amongst such important personages. We sat down at the far end of the table: I was on Kemble's left and Courtice Pounds next to me. As the steward came to Kemble (Beetle, as he was always called) for orders, someone on his right made a facetious remark about him having looked upon the wine when it was red. Beetle waved the steward away and began to admonish the offender. This raised laughs higher up the table. Thereupon the Beetle started methodically to tick everybody off, passing from one to the other and expressing in no flattering language his opinion of them. After a quarter of an hour of this, and seeing we had no supper, a young member immediately opposite us leant across and asked us what we would like. We fell in with his suggestion, grilled sole and marrow-bones and a bottle of the widow. The Beetle still continued his harangue. When the soles and wine appeared and were placed before us, Beetle, having passed round the top of the table, caught sight out of the tail of his eye, the food. He stopped and inquired who had ordered "*this*". The young member admitted he had taken compassion on us. "I order my guests' food myself. Take this away and bring cold roast beef and pickles— And as for *you*, sir"—and he told the young member off, and went up the table, taking each in turn and forgetting when he overlapped. It was far from an amusing evening for us, and the supper did not make up for it. Kemble in the far-away happy Victorian days was eventually rounded up by the income-tax collector, who demanded a sum of nineteen pounds odd, owing for some years past. The Beetle wrote out the cheque, handed it over, saying: "Will you kindly inform the Berkshire widow that in future she must not regard me as a perpetual source of income."

The saying that listeners never hear any good of themselves was never better exemplified than in the following story. I often used to travel up to London from my farm by the breakfast train from Stroud. On one such journey, having finished breakfast, in passing the galley I looked in and, tipping the *chef* a couple of bob, asked if I might look round. I was interested to see what kind of saucepans he used to counteract the swaying of the train. I found

he used 'the same as I did on my cooker with the car running. He was a North-countryman, and he asked me if I were interested in cooking. So I told him about my patent cooker, how I could cook whilst travelling at 50 miles an hour, and how I kept ice adjacent to the steaming-pans. He just listened and interjected "Aye" every now and then. I said good morning, and had just turned the corner when I heard him call out to one of the dining-car attendants. So I stopped to listen. "Alf," bawled he, and Alf appeared. "Who's that big fat — just been talkin' to me?" "Don't you know?" said Alf. "That's old Chu Chin Chow." "'Oo?" "Old Chu Chin Chow," repeated Alf. "Well," said he from the North, "he's the biggest bloody liar I've ever met in my life." And that was *that*.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

What is Amiss with the Theatre ?

MY excuse for writing on this subject is that the theatre has been my life and the means whereby I have lived. And I consider I know as much about the theatre, its private and public life, as anyone living. For I have been on the stage for close on forty years. I have played on four continents. I have studied under the best masters. I worked my way up from super to leading man. I have been an actor-manager for about twenty-five years. I have produced the biggest productions London has witnessed. I have written or dramatized and produced four of the record successes : *Chu, Count Hannibal, Kismet* and *Cairo*. I have also produced for Daly's Theatre its record success, *The Maid of the Mountains*. And, as I have before stated, my judgement has been at fault but once. And as an actor I have won the highest praise from the Press for my Othello, Petruchio, Sir John Falstaff, and many another classical rôle ; and also for my work in modern plays as Maldonado in *Iris* and Hornblower in *The Skin Game*. Therefore I feel myself competent to express views. And I smile at any contradiction, especially if it emanates from the just-weaned from the milk-bottle set of critics.

To begin with, the theatre as the theatre is itself amiss. There is not one theatre in the whole of Great Britain up-to-date. The great majority are as old-fashioned and obsolete as Nelson's wooden walls would have been at the battle of Jutland.

There is not an architect in England, apparently, who is acquainted with the requirements of the artistes and the producers behind the curtain, or the comfort of the audience in front. I will take the auditorium first. The division of the seating accommodation is all wrong. The highest-priced seats are the stalls from the orchestra rail to as many rows back as will meet the demand. A seat at the extreme end of the row is priced the same as the one in the middle. This is absurd, even granting that the end seat has a clear view of the entire stage, which it has not. In any case, it is looking at the picture from an angle. In my opinion, the centre seats should be separated from the side seats by a gangway.

The centre block should be higher priced than the side block. This should apply to all parts of the house. And there should be only one tier above the floor of the house. The same division of seats should apply to the other parts of the house. All the seats should be roomy and with sufficient room between for people to pass by in comfort both to themselves and others. Every seat should be supplied free of cost with a strong pair of glasses which can be fixed in any desired position by the user, to enable him or her to see the expression on an artiste's face, as one sees it at a cinema by means of a close-up. And each seat should be furnished with a pair of ears to catch the voice from the stage and remit it into the ear of the occupier of the seat. This is all quite feasible. It would counteract the advantage the talkies have at present—audibility. Cloak-rooms should be free and also programmes. The programme of characters and scenes could be projected on to the proscenium, thus obviating the disconcerting rustle of paper to find information on the programme. The lavatory accommodation should be ample and the refreshment-room likewise. A seating accommodation of 2,000, with top price 6s. and lowest at 1s. would give a house of £400 to £450. Behind the curtain, the architect should consult the producer of plays. By so doing, manual labour would be greatly diminished; the changes of scene simplified and accelerated, the artistes within easy reach of the stage, and the dressing-rooms ventilated and heated or cooled as required, and the orchestra hidden under the stage, except for musical comedy.

The electric lighting should be, and could be, under the control of one man with a keyboard. It is not necessary that, as in some theatres, bathrooms should be provided for the artistes except in unusual cases, as in *Mameena*, where we were made up from head to foot, two bathrooms would suffice, as long as there were good basins and foot-baths in each room. Until the theatre vies with the cinema as regards the comfort and warmth of its patrons, and decreases the price of seats, the cinema and the talkies will always be a menace. The entertainment they offer can never compete with a well-written, well-acted, well-produced play. The cinema and the talkie is at present in the same position as a well-lighted, beautifully-decorated and appointed restaurant, where rather inferior food is served on good china, with spotless napery, glass and plate, by polite waiters clad in well-cut clothes, with white gloves and clean shirt-fronts, and everything around pleasant and warm—and all at cheap prices. The theatre is as a rather dilapidated eating-house, cold and draughty, where well-cooked food of the best quality is served on chipped, greasy crockery, cutlery old and worn, glass dull and chipped, waiters boozy of nose and oozy of shirt-fronts, dirty-nailed, inattentive, the napery of poorest cotton and

stained with Guinness and anchovy sauce, and the prices *excessive*.

Now, which would *you* patronize? But, oh dear no! The theatre owners consider a plain bench in the gallery good enough for the patron who can only pay a shilling, but has stood outside waiting in the queue for hour after hour. Take the ordinary medium-sized theatre of to-day in London. A man and his wife make up their minds over dinner to see a show. They pick out a success which starts at 8.30. Dinner over, they arrive in a taxi about 8.25. The man inquires at the box-office for a couple of stalls. The play being a success, the box-office keeper naturally insults him. I have often noticed how rude the box-office keeper is at a success, and how polite and 'umble at a flop. Poor Mr. Man is told he must book six weeks in advance, etc. Then, perhaps, in a condescending manner, the box-office fellow will say he's had two stalls returned. Back row, side seats, 14s. 6d. each. Mr. Man purchases same and proceeds to enter auditorium. A commissioner yells "Tickets" at him, grabs the piece of paper out of his hand, tears a bit off, shoves them back into his hand and yells left or right, as the case may be. Never a "sir"—oh, no! This is a success. Then a black, fluffy-haired piece of female impertinence tries to pull his coat and hat off him, for which assault and housing of his property she charges him sixpence, with a hope in her glinting eyes of another sixpence. Then female No. 2 shoves a programme in his hand for another sixpence and another hope. At last he and his wife seat themselves in two most uncomfortable rickety stalls, with a pillar in front of them. It is now ten minutes after the curtain should have gone up. The house is beginning to fill. Then the orchestra starts. A dud pianist, a dud violinist, a dud 'cellist play dud tunes beneath dusty dud palm-leaves, and at ten minutes to nine the curtain goes up. Half-way through the act the house fills up. Of course neither man nor wife has heard a word. With natural acting you are not supposed to hear anything beyond the third row of the stalls. To be heard beyond that the poor dear young actor or actress straight from the academy would have to shout, knowing nothing about voice production or enunciation. But of natural acting, later. In the interval the man buys his wife a nasty lemonade or ice-cream at famine prices. He goes up to the bar. A haughty or hopeful barmaid gives him a bad whisky-and-soda, and charges him anything she chooses. At about 10.15 the entertainment of one hour and twenty-five minutes is over, and he gets a taxi if he's lucky, for a bob tip, and he and his wife drive home. The evening has cost him 29s. for seats, 1s. for cloak-room, 1s. for programme, 2s. 6d. for whisky-and-soda, and 1s. for ice for his wife, 1s. for tip to get a taxi and 4s. for fares—or 39s. 6d. in all. And next door to his flat he could have sat in comfort

and warmth in a cinema for a couple of hours or more, and been entertained at a total cost of 5s. or so.

In provincial towns the theatre proper is hidden down side streets; there is no illumination to advertise their whereabouts, they have not had a paint-brush near them for thirty years, the upholstery of the stalls should be in the British Museum, there is no attempt at heating, and the manager boasts of the business the house did when Edmund Kean played there. It was very interesting, when, a few weeks ago, I visited a provincial theatre where I had been with Benson thirty years ago, to find my name in pencil by a gas-bracket claiming it as my dressing-place all those years ago. All the small theatres in London are obsolete and at the rents asked not a commercial proposition.

The second thing amiss with the theatre is the programme that is offered. Compare to-day's theatre offering with that of twenty-five years or so ago. Irving at the Lyceum, Tree at His Majesty's, Alexander at the St. James's, Hawtrey at the Comedy, Harrison and Maude at the Haymarket, Wyndham at the Criterion, George Edwardes managing Daly's, Drury Lane with pantomime and autumn drama—each theatre had its policy. You knew exactly the kind of dish each one offered. If you wanted a light dinner, or a six-course dinner, or a mixed grill, or a delicate French repast, you knew where to go. To-day you go one week to a theatre and see—shall we say?—the Guitrys, and the following week, at the same theatre, "Mrs. Cut-em-down" in *Cow-heel and Eels*, a *juicy revue*. And the managers are responsible for the bill of fare offered. We still have a few actor-managers. Sir Gerald du Maurier, a fine artiste and with the same generous kindness of the old school, Fred Terry, and Sir John Martin Harvey, both so seldom seen in Town, Matheson Lang, Tom Walls and one or two starters. When the theatre follows a settled policy success follows. Other than actor-managers have no sympathy with their companies. No commercial manager has ever done the stage an honour by associating himself with it, and some have always lowered it, several men who have earned money by following their own line of business have of late years been attracted to the theatre. They would own theatres, run theatres, run plays. Some started by trying to run the theatre as a brothel. I know what I am writing about. I have watched them. Chorus-girls jumped into leading parts, comets for a few nights only. Drunken friends invited by the theatre magnates to drink in the chorus-girls' dressing-rooms. Happily this did not last long. They were warned. Eventually they paid for it. They burnt their fingers. They lost thousands. Then they crashed, in different ways. And each exit left the theatre cleaner. Towards the end of the War and immediately after, the men who controlled the theatre were, with few exceptions, a mixed

bag. More than one had done time, others who had luckily escaped it, illiterate aliens, and pimps. The theatre was never at a lower ebb. Gradually the water is running clearer as the mud is removed. Before long, perhaps, the theatre will occupy the same proud position it did when actor-managers and men of the theatre controlled it. The authors are to a certain extent responsible for the poverty of good plays. I believe there are many good plays written, but it has been difficult, owing to the lack of intelligence on the part of the managers, for those plays to be produced. I have read many good plays, both costume and modern, but I could find no money to back my opinion. The managers have been like sheep. Should a crook play succeed, they all rush to put on crook plays. If one American musical play makes a hit, then they all put on an American musical play. They do not like to hear the author read his play to them, in case he reads *too well*. They have no time to read it themselves so it is handed to a *reader* ! Have you ever seen a *reader* ? The play is sent back to the author. He sends it to another manager. And so the game of pat-ball continues until the author is fed up, and loses heart. Of course, those with a name can generally find a hearing, and probably some manager will have it produced. It is accepted on the name. The *Journey's End* had a long journey of it, here and there, before it came to rest. The manager, as a rule, has so little opinion of himself that he is chary about backing his opinion of anything.

But it is easy for an American author to have his play produced or for an American to find English capital to put on a play, by an American in a London theatre. London managers and syndicates either do not or cannot judge a play by reading it. There have been managers, of course, who could neither read nor write. So these managers either go themselves or send someone over to America to buy an already assured success—in America. It is exactly like a man who goes into horse-racing without knowing a horse from a platypus. He cannot judge a horse's points. He has to rely on other judgement to buy his yearlings, or pay through the nose for some star performer who has already won the Derby, the St. Leger, and has only a few races left in him. So the London manager at great expense buys a show which has already been running for years in America. And the only races left for that show to run is London and the provinces. How much better to buy with brains a play that has all the world to run in. And yet, looking back some years, I should say American plays have lost more money over here than they have made. Of course, there was *No, No, Nanette*, the one great money-spinner, and *Mercenary Mary*. These are the only two winners that jump to my mind. And yet there must have been scores of American failures. The Drury Lane American spectacular musical shows : *Rose Marie*, *The Desert Song* and *The Show Boat* are rules to them-

selves. Each one had a long run, though each one briefer than its predecessor. Of straight plays, *The Trial of Mary Dugan* and—what else? *Broadway* did not make a fortune, nor *Burlesque*; *Patsy*, despite splendid notices, wilted and lost money. And so did *Little Accident*; *Blue Eyes* and *The Vagabond King* must have lost thousands to give them the appearance of successes. *Porgy*, the slice of negro life, has failed to attract London.

Then why all this flying over to America for shoddy shows? And why this invasion of all-American artistes, the majority of whom annoy our ears with their dreadful jargon and sometimes disgust our eyes with their habits? All sorts of indecencies have been imported into this country from America in connection with the theatre. In return we send over our old masters. C. B. Cochran's all-British revue at the Pavilion, and Laddie Cliff's *Love Lies*, etc., are outstanding examples of what can be done at home. And in America the two big successes are *Journey's End* and *The Bird in Hand*. That is a bit of an offset.

But worse than the influx of American plays was the influx of American "perdoocers". They have done no good to the English theatre. But their work is praised by the Press, because they are foreigners, as, before the War, everything German was praised.

The next thing amiss with the theatre is the acting. Now we have some of the finest actors and actresses in the world for certain plays. English acting is at its best in Society plays and low-life plays. But even in these plays it is too often the case of being seen and not heard, by some members of the company. And in many cases, when they are heard, their pronunciation of ordinary words is so terrible as to be almost a worse evil. "Where," "were", and "wear", and "we're" are all pronounced in one way. "Which" and "witch" are pronounced alike, and "what" becomes "wot".

It is a common complaint that the younger generation of actors and actresses cannot be heard. They retort that they are natural actors, like Charles Hawtrey and Charles Wyndham. Ye gods! Hawtrey and Wyndham had the art to conceal art. They gave the impression they were speaking as they would in ordinary life. And their lowest whisper could be heard all over the house. But it is not only their speaking which is wrong. They have no technique. They cannot walk or sit down gracefully. After their first appearance in a speaking part, they are generally in the hands of a throat specialist for the remainder of their careers, which, as a rule, are mercifully short. It is the lack of such training-schools as the Benson Company that has caused this shortage. When they build the new theatre at Stratford, the governors ought to found a school there. They should engage a dozen actors and actresses of repute and experience.

Pupils should pay so much for so many years' tuition and actual experience on the stage. The theatre could be kept open all the year round at cheap prices for admission, playing everything except musical comedy. Then when the Celebration weeks came round, there would be a first-class stock company, consisting of tutors and pupils. Well-known stars could be invited down to play the principal parts, and, naturally, prices would be raised. In this way also there would be a Shaw fortnight, a Galsworthy fortnight, a Pinero fortnight, a Mansfield fortnight, etc., etc.

Another thing amiss with the theatre is the audience.

Playgoers, as distinct from theatre-goers, are in a great majority. The playgoer wants entertainment only ; he does not want to think. Only to be entertained with a new story. The theatre-goer loves the art of the theatre. The playgoer would shrink from seeing any of Shakespeare's plays, except as a stunt. The theatre-goer would see as many *Hamlets* as possible, to compare one reading with another. Since the War began the audience has changed. The intellectuals have been driven into the upper circle, the war profiteers have invaded the stalls. Any old *Family Herald* story, of crime and detection, is food for them. Anything poetical or beautiful they cannot understand. Shakespeare, save when it was done as a stunt in modern dress, has been almost a stranger in London for many years. And yet I believe that his plays, properly presented, would create a thirst for them.

And to make the theatre a paying proposition, and without State aid, it must be made to pay. Artistes' salaries must come down and also authors' fees. Such absurd salaries as £250 to £400 a week are nonsensical. The actor-manager or the man who knew his business never paid these salaries. And in no one case has it ever paid the commercial manager. I can point to one young lady who is supposed to be a great popular draw. She demands, and is paid, a huge salary. But she has not been in a success for over four years. Now, if she is worth her salt, surely she should draw money into the house. But I can count seven successive plays she has been starred in, and each one has been a financial failure. All these shows were not feeble. If the play draws on its own merits, then high-salaried artistes are not necessary. If the play does not draw, then the highly-paid artiste is engaged to attract money. And they always fail to do so. All these record takings one reads of in dramatic gossip for such and such a play are fictitious. Put these highly-paid artistes to the test. Stand one up in the theatre alone to draw the public to listen to their genius, and how many will succeed in drawing their week's salary ? There are only two great artistes who have been able on their own to fill a theatre unaided. Not your *matinée* idol or your fluffy flapper. Harry Lauder and Ruth Draper. And all

your sneers cannot wipe out the fact. And Paul Robeson. But a negro always has a certain attraction for some people.

Many plays have failed not because of lack of support but from excessive cost of the caste. A young man or young girl without any pretensions to any acting ability, but merely blessed with good looks, demands from ten to twenty pounds a week to fill a part of a few lines. They should be paying the manager to learn their business. Moreover, once an actor or actress has gained a certain position, he or she aspires to management, or at least a say in the production of the plays in which they appear. Two instances of this came directly under my notice quite recently. Both were good actors, but unwise fellows. The first was Carl Brisson I produced the musical comedy in which he appeared as D'Artagnan in a version of *The Three Musketeers*. The version used was supposed to be adapted from Dumas's novel by two Americans, male and female. But in reality it was a flagrant copy, word for word, scene for scene almost, and error for error of an old play *The Three Musketeers*, by Charles Rice, obtainable at French's. The music was good and full of punch. Carl Brisson was excellent, and was a most delightful fellow to work with. He fell in with all my views, and on its opening night made a great personal success. So did the whole show. Then when I left, after a week, and the show went on its tour from town to town, he, as being largely interested in its success, began to alter this and alter that, cutting out other people's "bits" and enlarging his own. I journeyed down several weeks after, and stole in and watched it from the pit, unknown to anyone. It had lost all cohesion and punch, and the team-work had gone to pieces. The result was a loss of many thousand pounds.

The second case is that of Harry Welchman in *The White Camellia*, which I produced for him at Blackpool last autumn. I made several alterations in the story and found Harry a most pleasant man to rehearse with, though always rather in the clouds. It contained charming music and the setting was of the best, and a good all-round caste did the play justice. On the first night it met with a great reception. I stayed on and altered and improved it until, when I finally saw it on the Friday night, I was thoroughly satisfied with it. Had it been left alone, it could not have failed. But again the leading man, having a big financial interest in it, started tinkering and altering it, cutting down the comedy as much as he could and trying to make his own part much bigger. It was quite big enough to start with. But he was not satisfied. Rehearsals were called nearly every day. I paid several secret visits to it in the provinces. The whole plot was changed, songs cut and songs introduced; one character, quite a telling character, cut to nothing, and the one bright comedienne was given her notice before the show

opened at Daly's. I went to the pit one night and saw it. Although my name still appeared on the programme as producer, nearly all my work had been altered, I scarcely recognized the show. I noticed that Harry Welchman's part seemed more prominent. But prominence does not necessarily mean an improvement—a prominent nose or stomach, for instance. No wonder it was a failure. It had been made silly. Again, in this case, the leading man in seeking to make his part so important as to dwarf all others, had cost him, as he confesses, many thousand pounds of his own hard-earned money.

Some of the best artistes we have are incapable of producing themselves or a play. They cannot see themselves. And how many rehearse and speak facing a mirror? No one can tell the full effect of a gesture or a turn of the head or the expression of the face or eyes without the aid of a mirror. Tomasso Salvini, long after he had retired from the stage, used to have his hour before the mirror, or rather, mirrors. For he had a room constructed of mirrors, so he could see himself from every angle. Here, stripped to the skin, he would walk, gesticulate, speak, watching his reflection. Ernesto Rossi did the same. If some singers could only watch the grimaces they make before inflicting them on an audience, the world would be more beautiful. The lack of grace on the part of our young men and women on the stage is obviously due to carelessness in their training, if they have had any, or their own blindness to their movements. Perhaps it is due to the change of taste in dancing. Instead of the graceful waltzes, we have the jerky, waggling, shaking movements of the nigger.

And, last but not least, the critics. It is very difficult to express one's views on this subject. The right time and place to do so is one's death-bed, after the morning papers have gone to Press. Your obituary notice would appear, I suppose, in the luncheon racing editions of the evening papers; your views on critics in the afternoon edition, and you would be all nice and cold and phlegmatic by the time your critics were hitting back. And though you can *hit* a dead man, you cannot *hurt* him. He is watching the words flow from your scurrilous stylo, and he has got his thumb to his nose, with his fingers spread out fanwise, and the little finger is pointing to *you*. He has got you where so often you have had him. There are few critics who are competent to criticize either the play or the actors. Many of them are disappointed dramatists. Whether it be honest to damage the goods of a rival I do not know. It certainly is not cricket. I have heard one critic broadcasting his opinions of current plays, advising his listeners-in not to waste their money in going to such and such a play. Now, surely he is liable to an action for damages. If a theatre manager invites a critic to his first night, he is inviting

him to express his opinion in the paper he is associated with. If he is not invited to the theatre, but has to pay for his seat, then he cannot express his views publicly, if by so doing he is damaging the play. He cannot walk into Lipton's, buy a pound of bacon, and then write in his paper that it is the worst bacon he has ever tasted, that the price of it is scandalous, etc., etc. But if Sir Thomas sends him an invitation to visit one of his shops and sample the goods there, free, and express his views publicly, he is at liberty to cut himself loose and to the best of his ability do all damage possible. Is it fair for a dramatist, whose plays are not produced, or if produced are failures, to deliberately do damage to his more successful brother? Twenty years ago, several critics used to possess plays they had written, and a few nights before the manager produced his new show, he would receive a play from one of these critics with a covering letter, wishing the manager success with his new show, but adding that in the event of failure, perhaps the enclosed play might be found suitable, an option for six months on same obtainable by a cheque for £50 or so. Some of us paid, some did not. If you paid, you got a good notice. There was a case in which a manager produced one of these plays which had been sent round and round for years. Of course, it was a failure, but to the critic it meant a certain loss of income for years, and he had to write another. It is the first duty of a critic to *help*, not to *destroy*. But how many are in a position to be constructive? Many are not competent to correct the faulty pronunciation of English. I listened one night to a well-known critic broadcasting on this very subject. He dropped his *h*'s in such words as which, when, who, where, whither; and this is almost as bad as the Surreyite discussing the merits of 'Aywood, 'Obbs, 'Olland, 'Itch. "Wot abart Abel?" he was asked. "Habel does not start with an 'H'," said he. I am sure that all actors and actresses would welcome criticism, even adverse criticism, if they had pointed out to them what their faults were and wherein they failed, and how they could improve. But is there one critic in London who could do this? So many of them are merely reporters of dressing-room scandals and nothing more. But it is the actor who is responsible for the state of the theatre. He alone can save it from the doldrums. All the talkies and all the movies will never take the place of the *living* magnetism.

These talkies are clever. They are a novelty. And as novelties they will for a time succeed in hurting the theatre. But the time will come when the absurdity of a tin voice coming from a flat photograph of a mouth will strike home. Is it a beautiful sight to watch and listen to a close-up scene between a man and a woman? Each face is about 6 feet long and 3 feet wide. Every pore of the skin can be seen; the clogged painted lips open, and one sees the slightest sign of decay or gold in the teeth; one see the magnified tongue and

the veins and muscles under the tongue ; and the uvula and tonsils, and all that therein is, as one listens to the impassioned words of love. A magnified mouth, tongue, veins, cannot be termed romantic.

When the architect, the manager, the author, the actor, the producer, the audience, and the critic all combine to help, each in his particular way, the theatre need fear no rival.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Last Look Behind

HOW many times in one's life, at a certain crisis or at a parting of the ways, does one look behind? Sometimes it is a furtive glance over the shoulder, sometimes a complete right-about-face, head thrown back, fists clenched and jaws snapped together, and a challenge: "Well, what about it, damn you!" The latter is often as not a sign of defeat. I have experienced the same look behind after both victory and defeat, the only difference being the smile in one's heart after victory. My first look behind was on leaving the Melbourne Grammar School at the age of sixteen or thereabouts. And as I looked, I saw the wasted years and wasted money. I had enjoyed a good time, made some good friends, but I had not taken advantage of the opportunities offered me, nor used the brains I had been blessed with to their full extent. I never worked hard during term. I could always keep a decent position in the form, knowing well that at examination-time I would sweep the board, and cock-a-doodle-do at the top. I could cram three months' work into a few days. I had a prodigious memory, or visualizing ability. A leading article of a column in a newspaper I could repeat without a mistake after reading it through twice. That, of course, is visualizing, not memorizing. But when I set out to memorize I could pack away in a securely-tied-up parcel in my brain-box the longest act of any of Shakespeare's plays after a couple of hours' study. And I would never forget it. Even now, parts which I played with F. R. Benson thirty years ago and which I have never thought of or seen enacted since, I can pull out of my brain safe and repeat without an error. With this gift of visualizing and memory I had thrown away great chances. But I did not care. At examination, the prize was mine. I remember one prize I won was for history and geography. Both were favourite subjects of mine. I spent a couple of nights close reading and memorizing English history, and visualizing the dates of the different kings' reigns and battles, etc. These I wrote down on a long list and visualized sufficiently long to last a couple of days. Then I got a friendly tip from one of the servants that one of the tests in the geography-paper was to be the drawing from memory of a map of the United States of America, with all their different states and capitals thereof, and rivers and mountains. I passed

this information on to my pals for what it was worth. I took a wider field and visualized for a couple of days, and right up to the moment of going in, the map of North America. Sure enough, the test was as she had said, a map of the U.S.A. For swank, I drew a map of the whole of North America from Panama to the Arctic icelands of Canada. Then I concentrated on the United States, putting in every river and its mountainous source, the mountains, the capitals, the ports, lakes, and the funny thing about it was that I knew I was right in every detail. The master in charge, Cooper, I think, passed by my desk and noticed the very elaborate map I was drawing. His presence interrupted my vision, as it were, and I waited for him to go away. "Well, Asche, why don't you go on?" "I'm sorry, sir, but I can't whilst you're there watching me." "I suppose not," he laughed. "Come, out with it," he demanded. "What?" I asked. "The map you are copying from." "Search me," I replied. And he did, and my desk and my pals on either side of me. But he found nothing. "It's no use telling me you're doing that from memory. I'll put you somewhere else." And he did, up on the dais away from everyone. And, moreover, he took away my half-completed map. "If you're doing it from memory, you can do it again." And so I had to start afresh. Now, this was unfair, as visualizing only lasts for a certain time, and I doubted if I could do it all over again. I had never tried doing a thing twice from the same photograph. For economy of brain I started on the United States alone, cutting out Mexico and Canada, etc. The first part of the map was difficult to reproduce, but as soon as I got on to where I had left off on the other I went ahead full steam. Old Cooper was sitting on the dais, about six or eight feet on my left. He had been keeping an eye on me, I knew. I had finished the map, but I could not recall to my sight the exact coast-line of Canada. It had gone! Faded out! However, I had done what had been set, a map, etc., of U.S.A. Then I looked at Cooper. He had been looking at my first map, and had set it up against a water-bottle, and was now deep in a yellow-back novel. I squinted at the map, which I could see quite plainly, and by its aid correctly copied and added to my present map Canada, Mexico, etc., rivers and mountains of same. I won the prize for the two subjects, and for my memory map received full marks, too.

All this again comes to my mind, as it did then when I took a look behind. The next time I looked behind was with a rather ashamed glance over my shoulder as I stole away from home to "hump the bluey". It was no use arguing with my conscience that I was right. I knew I was doing an unkind thing to mother, that she would worry and worry about me. But I was pig-headed and kept on my way. And I never regretted it, and never have. Those eight or nine months of absolute freedom and absolute dependence upon

myself, fending and cooking for myself, answerable to no one, my own boss as I had never been before and never have been since, made up the very essence of life, the spice of being. Down there in my cave at night, gazing out over the red embers of my fire at the moonlit sapphire sea, with no living human soul within miles and miles, the lapping of the water on the beach and the snoring of Parkes the only sounds of the night, the final stir-up of the fire and the throwing down of one's body on the heap of aromatic gum-leaves, and the long untroubled sleep : all this was worth it. And I thought so as I looked behind me when I left that cave for the last time. It was a long-drawn-out look behind that time, sitting cock-eyed on Sambo. Well worth it. And I think so now, as I look behind over all the waste of years. The glories of the dawn and the freshening sting of the salt water as one plunged into the swell of the wave, the mouthful and the nosefuls of cold salt water, more precious and health-giving than any throat specialist's nasal douche and patent inhaler. The wind and sun your towel, no tired, dragged-down feeling from a night before, fit to scrap with anything and anybody, insolent in one's health and youth—all this given up—for what ? For paint on one's face and the glare of artificial lights in one's eyes, the dirt, the struggle, the petty jealousies, the over-drinking and the artificialities of the actor's calling. The sincere and lasting affection and worship in your dog's eyes exchanged for the false smile and lying passion in the blue-rimmed eyes of the goddesses of the stage. And yet I can look back now defiantly at that past, and challenge it. Well, what about it, damn you ! Had I stayed with you, years would have been piled on years, the same as now, the everlasting never-changing beauty and the open-air freedom of you would but have fed my body, not my brain. And I should have died an old man, maybe older, much older, than I die without you, but having known nothing, achieved nothing. A *vegetable* ! Health and strength were all you had to offer. I was not content with that, and so I left you, though I loved you.

And yet again I looked behind, as I sailed away from those gems set in a turquoise sea, those wondrous islands of palm and coral and skins of every hue and shading. Those lotus-eaters, those happy children of the sun, generous in their love and hate. And as I waved my hand to Dick, and he and his merry wives of Fiji waved to me back, I laughed at him. "You," I laughed, "king of all you survey. Wives to wait on you, to cook for you, to bathe you, comfort your bed and play to you ; a score of servants and a good trading ; and in three years you'll be back in Sydney spending your three years' income in a month or two on white men's drinks and white women's bodies, and then back you'll go to your dusky wives and children, and so on until there comes a time when you no longer hit the Australian coast, but sit all huddled up under your palms, with

blankets on you, and your dusky wives waiting for the rattle in your throat, my friend Dick. And they'll bury you. They may even eat you, make long pig of you. And what have you to show for life? Good fellowship, indolence and gluttony." And yet—life was good there for a time. A waste of life, but a waste with fascinating wasters. I had been urged to stay. But though I had for the first time in my life experienced passion, the charms of my sweet teacher could not hold me. Moonlight madness turns to sanity in the sun. Passion born of shaded lights and fed through half-closed eyes is stripped bare and laid all naked in its ugliness in the sun. With your mistress's arms around you as you lie beneath the shadow of the palms in the kind moonlight, listening to her whispered passion, her cool smooth cheek against yours, with nothing to interrupt her words save the sound of the surf and the tinkle of some music in the distance, it is not possible for you to break away. But in the fierce rays of the searching sun it is easy to say good-bye. The sun is cruel to passion. It kills the offspring of the moon and night. Only love can live in the sun, and there is no love in those islands of the Pacific. So I had no regrets as I looked behind, that time. I lay down and gazed and laughed across the creaming wake of the schooner as with full-bellied sails she sped before the wind. I gazed at those lovely islands of rest and peace, of soul-rotting, ambition-rotting peace and idleness, and laughed as they dwindled in the distance, and felt no tug, no pang.

But when I looked behind next time, over the stern of the Norwegian tramp as she thudded her way out between the heads of Port Jackson at sunrise, shutting off from my sight, perhaps for ever, the beauty of that wondrous harbour, then love indeed tugged at my heart. Not the love of my sweetheart, in whose care I had left my greyhound, Nellie; not so much the love for my mother, great though that was; but the love for that old man sitting at his desk, with his white-hatted head buried in his hands. For the first time I realized I loved him, that I had never understood him, that I wanted now to know him. Too late. I should never have the chance now. I knew unless I returned at once I should never see him again. Poor old fellow! His had been a hard life, a disappointed life. Blessed, perhaps rather cursed, with a brilliant brain, he had outcast himself to a country where at that time the scum of the world congregated. Some pioneers of breeding and education were sprinkled about, but he, owing to his unfortunate inability to master English, had to herd with the gold-seekers. In those days it was a cruel, callous country. Convicts transported to Botany Bay for the most trifling offences were maltreated, tortured and goaded by their English gaolers until they turned into wild beasts. As ticket-of-leave men they were let out as servants to the



TWO HAPPY SNAPS OF OSCAR ASCHE

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colonists, and in turn the majority of these colonists had their whack at them. It was a country of crime by both free men and convicts. Read the history of Tasmania, if you want to learn how *gently* English gaolers treated English prisoners, some of them mere boys transported for stealing a loaf of bread or poaching a rabbit. Herded and chained together on the long voyage out with hardened criminals, under the worst sanitary conditions, can it be marvelled at that the iron ate into their souls? The descendants of these poor outraged wretches live. Can it be wondered therefore that there be many men in Australia who hate England and everything English? Read "For the Term of His Natural Life", and think things over.

In 1887, Queen Victoria's Jubilee, I was present in Sydney at the unveiling of that most gracious sovereign's statue on the very spot where the old triangles stood, where convicts were strapped up whilst brutal fellow-convicts, chosen for the job on account of their love of cruelty, cut them gradually, stroke by stroke, to ribbons of raw flesh with their cat-o'-nine-tails.

Yes, Australia was not a country, in those days, for people of education and refinement. Australia in the first instance only attracted the adventurous, the seekers after fortune, men who flocked from all parts of the world, old and new, in the great gold-rush. No man of family, unless he were a wastrel, made Australia his home. The British officer or British Government official scurried back home to civilization as soon as his time came. It was not till much later that men of the learned professions came across to this new land. But the pioneers, the men who pushed out into the unknown and squatted there were the backbone of the country. A great many of these were of Scotch farming stock, the finest colonists in the world. But these men had little or no education, and father coming straight from Christiania, with his University's honours thick upon him, his family one of the most respected in Norway, must have felt strangely out of place at first among the mob with which he was forced to associate, the majority of them unable to read or write. I have always marvelled at the fact that, accustomed as he was to the foul language of the mining camps, his strongest oath was "By Creation!" Now and then, when he met a man of education, he would sit and discuss for hours subjects beyond my ken. He was, indeed, "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd". He transmitted his brains to his grandchildren, for both of his grandsons and his granddaughter took highest honours at the Melbourne University. I thought of all the years he had been following uncongenial occupations. How he had ever been a mounted trooper I know not. He must have been, like myself, a poor horseman. He knew the name of the man who brought the first lot of rabbits into Australia for sporting purposes. They came from a vicarage near Hastings, and the name of the family who was responsible for

the pest is Australian-famous. It is— No, it would be mean to give it now.

After being a miner he had turned storekeeper. And it came about in this way. It was either in Bendigo or Camperdown; being on his uppers through ill-luck at mining, he had accepted the post of handy-man at the local stores. Being strong, he was used to carry round to the customers barrels of beer and whisky, etc., heavy orders which generally went by van. One night he had a row with the boss because he refused to take round a final barrel of beer. He said he was too tired; and so the boss told him to go. And he went. Now it was well known that the storekeeper, having made his pile, wanted to sell out and clear down to Melbourne. And the price wanted was posted up outside the doorway. In the morning father turned up as usual. The boss reminded him of the fact that he was sacked. "I know that," said father, "but I come to buy your store. By Creation, I do." And he threw down the bags of gold-dust for the storekeeper to weigh. The right amount having been handed over and a simple receipt given, the old boss walked out and the new one took his place. And how he became owner was thus. There were a goodly number of Scandinavians in the district. These he went to and told of his plan. They lent him some twenty or thirty ounces of gold-dust, and then he explained his plan. They were to go to the principal hotel and start a game of hand-wrestling, very popular in Norway, and often played in England. It consists in two men facing each other across a narrow table, resting their elbows on the table and gripping palm to palm each other's hands. Then each tries to force the other's arm down until the back of the hand touches the table. Father's strength at that time was new to Camperdown and Bendigo. Father started the game rolling and won, from one of the Scandinavians. Then he lost on purpose to one of them, and paid over some dust. He made another bet with the same man and lost, and paid again. A crowd had collected round and bets were made. Then one hulking fellow bet he could put down the man's hand who had beaten father, and he won. Then father suggested a sweepstake at so many ounces each. Father would not come in. He said he stood no chance. He would be the judge. The end of the first sweep left the big hulking miner and the hotel boss in a good tussle for first prize. The hotel boss won, and scooped in about £400 in dust or I.O.U's. Others were attracted by the game. Another sweepstake was started, for newcomers only. When this had been won, the hulking miner, not satisfied with his defeat, suggested that he, the hotel boss and the new winner, should have a three-cornered match. Father, who was pretending to be a bit drunk, suggested himself as a fourth, and put down the stake he proposed, 20 ozs. each (about £100). The other three came in, and betting by the

onlookers began. My father was an easy outsider, four-to-one against, because they had seen him beaten by a man whom the hulking miner had beaten. However, father and his Scandinavian friend took the odds. It was to be two falls out of three. My father and the newcomer were the first combatants. Father was put down once and then won the other two. The hotel boss won his three straight out. So father and he met in the final. Any odds were offered. It was such a dead certainty for the hotel boss. Against the advice of those around him, father still backed himself at long odds, and put the money up—the money borrowed from his friends and that won in side bets on his bout with the newcomer.

"Vill you bet your hotel against my store I put you down?" asked father.

"What and where is your store?" asked the boss.

"McGuire's store, but vi three buy him to-morrow morning."

His friends nodded.

"My pub against your store. Come on," said the boss.

So the two faced each other, elbows on table and hands clasped, thumb-locked. And the crowd watched. Both arms remained upright. The hotel boss went red in the face and called out to father not to "grip so hard". "I don't vant to lose your hand," he replied. Of course, there was only one end to it. Down went the man's hand plunk on the table. "Von," said father. "Now vi do it left hand and I von't squeeze." The boss consented, and down went the hand again. "Two," said father, and he collected the sweepstakes and bits. "And now I vil bet you I put down two hands any man or two men's hands same time." A couple of men jumped at this bet. The hulking miner was one of them. The grip was set, but father had them both down at once.

The next morning, father owned both the stores and the principal hotel. And that was really his first start in life. This story was told me by his old mate, Charles Skarrat, whom I met at my first Waterloo Cup Meeting at Altcar. Charles Skarrat owned the Royal Hotel, George Street, Sydney, and sold it to my father. So I did not know this tale about him, or many others, when I said good-bye to him. But as I looked behind, I recalled all the times I had annoyed him and made fun of his quaint English, and I have often regretted that I never knew him, never appreciated him at his true worth. I was able to stand up for him once, years later, on my first visit to Australia as a "star". He was dead, the one of the family who most of all I would have lived. I was put up for a certain club by an old school friend. But I was not elected. There were certain objections to my candidature. Now there could be nothing against me at that time except that I was on the stage. But it was not that. I guessed and stated the reason. My father had been a *publican*. It is a peculiarity

of Australians to look down on publicans. I don't know why. It was at a little dinner I was giving, and two at least of the committee of that club were my guests. My suggestion of the objectionable detriment was laughed at. "Ah, but I know it is so. But you must remember," I said, "that though a publican, my father was no sinner, and he *paid* his passage to Australia, which is more than can be said for the forefathers of *some* members of your club." And that was that.

As we hugged the Australian coast on our way south, I looked at it with my glasses, wondering where my old cave was ; I looked behind at my wanderings through the bush, the rough but healthy life, hard work, hard pleasure, the 'possum shooting on moonlight nights, poor sport, but every skin a contribution to that 'possum rug. And the excitement of the hunt after old man kangaroo with the mongrel pack on his tail. Six foot and more of energy leap, leap, leaping for his life, and his final stand at bay, his back against a tree in some creek or water, downing the dogs with his forepaws as they swam to tackle him ; and the final merciful blow from stirrup-iron or loaded stick. Never again ! No more the awful silence and darkness of the bush at night, as your horse with unerring instinct carried you home. No more the appetizing smell of the morning chop frizzling over the wood fire, and the thick white frost on everything. All that is far behind me. Miles and miles and miles.

When next I looked behind, I was on the Embankment, again sleeping in the open, but oh, how different. The solitude of the bush is nought compared to that of London when one is down. For company, congenial company, there was always the Zoo. I could go and see my fellow-exiles the "wallaby and the cockatoo", "the parrakeet and the kangaroo". "And how do *you* like London ?" the big red 'roo seemed to ask me as he sat back on his tail and chewed. "Pretty rotten place," I'd reply. "Pretty rotten ! I call it — (Australianese) rotten, No — sun, no — room to stretch your — legs. Wonder if I'll ever b—— well get back home." And in another part I'd find the poor old laughing jackass sitting all mopey, with his feathers all ruffled. "What are you thinking of, Jack ?" I'd ask. "The same as you are, you silly —," he'd reply. "*Home !* They comes in 'ere, these crowds of white-faced loafers, look at my label and says 'Kookaburra, the Laughing Jackass'. Let's make 'im laugh. I've forgotten my h's," he explained, "because I never 'ear one 'ere. 'Laugh,' says a frowsy old white gin, and sticks her finger in my ribs. 'Laugh ? 'Ow can I b—— well laugh ? Where are my pals the maggies to laugh and joke with in the early morning, high up in the old white gum ? Laugh ! Good Gawd ! Sometimes I git a bit of a laugh to myself, if the old finger-sticker ain't smart enough to escape my beak.' She gives a squawk like a native cat, and

'er old man says, 'Serves you b—— well right for touchin' the b—— *parrot*!' *Me* a parrot, me a common Joey!' And he ruffles himself in his old brown feathers and closes his eyes and dreams of those sunny mornings beside the Darling River, where he used to open the concert, to be joined in by all his family and relatives and friends, and his black-and-white mates, the magpies, with their rich deep notes, until the whole bush rang with sounds like a peal of cathedral bells or the salutation to the moon by a kennel of hounds. It is their hymn of thanks to God for the joy of life. But Jack will sit on that same perch for years and years, until his soul is freed from his old body and flies off laughing across the ocean to the sun. Yes, I was better off than the 'roo or Jack or cocky or wallaby. I was *free*. I might go home some day. *They—never!* For the term of their natural lives—the Zoo.

And then when I did return, I had a long look behind as I stood on the deck of the *Orsova* and once more bid Australia farewell. I looked at the thousands of people who had come to see us off, thousands of unknown faces, but who claimed me as theirs, a fellow Australian who had made good in the big world. That triumphant return was something to look back upon. No sneers or jeers of the envious in later years could ever deprive me of the acclamations of my countrymen. It is difficult for an Englishman to realize the uplift of such a home-coming, because until lately when an artiste, having made good abroad, returned home to England, no notice was taken of the event. But with athletes returning victorious things are different. Then enthusiastic millions of their countrymen and women strew their path with laurels. And welcomes are now being extended to film artistes on their holiday visits home.

And here and now I turn round and look behind at the events during those many years between. A mixed lot, both good and bad. I have nothing to complain about. I made success after success, both financially and artistically. For everything good and everything bad I was alone responsible. Having attained my highest ambition on the stage and broken all records, I turned my attention to that other ambition which had been slumbering for years, viz., the winning of the Waterloo Cup. How I failed and what it cost me I have already related in another chapter.

And during the years I pursued this will-o'-the-wisp I enjoyed many, many happy times. First and foremost came the devotion of my favourite, Facey. She was human. She knew when Sundays came round, and at twelve noon on that day she would take up her position at the corner of my lane and the main road half a mile away, and wait for my car. Then she would bound into the seat beside me and talk to me. Not for a moment would she leave me until I said good-bye on Monday midday. Sometimes I would be

alone, and round me at dinner would sit Facey, the two Springer spaniels, Frisky and Countess, a half-Persian cat, Max, on my shoulder, trying to hook the meat from my fork, and two tortoiseshell kittens playing round about. Other Sundays there would be a merry party of four of us sitting down to a dinner I had specially cooked, and then upstairs in the smoking-room bridge or poker till our eyes fell out.

Well, the dogs went, and the farm went. I don't know that I regret it. I had a good time there. And so did many others. Other hobbies I look back on, some still with me—cricket. I am writing this at Lords Cricket Ground, sitting right up in the crow's nest of the pavilion, watching the cricket match below between Middlesex and Sussex this Whit-Monday of 1929. Never has there been a more pleasant cricket day than this, and never has there been brighter cricket nor a greater see-saw in the fortunes of the game. Over thirty-five years ago I would spend day after day here, paying my admission from the money I had earned the night before calling cabs. When I became a member some ten years or so later, every morning would find me in the squash court, and during summer at the nets afterwards. A cold bath and a laze in the sun on the top of the pavilion, watching the champion of the day in the middle. And many an enjoyable game I had there in August. Those were the days of youth, of fitness, strength. Inevitably came the time, only three years ago, when pads and gloves and bats and all the rest were packed away in bag and locker for the last time. You never know that it's the last time. Of course, you are going to turn out again next season. The season comes and passes. You may be abroad, and your cricket kit slumbers on. Next season you *will* play again. Then comes a fine morning in May. The laburnum and lilacs are out and the air of St. John's Wood is singing the song of the lawn-mower. You can smell the fresh-cut grass. So off you go to Lords. Sam, the ever active and young Sam, who looks after all your belongings, greets you. "Going to have a knock, sir?" "Rather," you shout. Your favourite bats are brought out in their paper envelopes all well oiled, your pads are spotless, and so are your flannels and boots. And you strip and pull on your trousers. They don't meet round you by a couple of inches. "Sam, these flannels are shrunk!" Sam shakes his head. "Never been washed, sir. Never been worn. One of the half-dozen pairs you had made two years ago, which were so easy." And then you realize how beautiful you've grown. "Tie the button to the hole, sir, with a piece of string," says Sam. "Your sweater will hide it." *Will it?* "No, sir, your sweater *has* shrunk. And it was new, too." But it grips you beneath the arms like a vice, and it won't pull over your waist. Sadly you strip all off again and back to mufti. Sam suggests letting them out. "No," you reply;

"I'll take off some weight." And you go downstairs and have a drink. And next season Sam says, "We're short of lockers, sir, and you won't be playing any more, will you, sir?" And you say "No!" So your locker is cleared and your card taken out of the slot, and some young stripling's goes in its place. And everything is packed neatly and tightly in your big leather cricket-bag covered with steamship and railway labels, and the hotel labels of all cricketing countries in the world. "You'll be taking it home, won't you? I'll put it on a taxi for you, sir." And you take it home and shove it out of sight, and your bats and pads and all settle down in the dark and dust for their long, long sleep. And later, when you are neatly and tightly packed away, what the moth has left within that old bag is resurrected for a jumble sale—if you have no son.

But between the two packings you can, as I have to-day, go and bask in the sun and watch the great old game, and criticize the play, and tell them how that ball should have been lifted over the mound. You can see and hear many a little comedy at Lords, and sometimes a little tragedy. Last season, 1928, I was fortunate to be present when the West Indian Constantine gave his greatest firework display. There was an old gentleman in a straw boater sitting in front of me, alone. He caught sight of two other members, apparently old friends, and he waved to them and they came along. They were all about seventy. "You're looking very rocky," said one of the newcomers to him of the straw hat. "I haven't seen you since last season." "No, I've been a bit queer," said Straw-hat. "A bit queer! My dear old boy, I wouldn't give you six months. What does your doctor say?" "Oh," says Straw-hat, "he says if I'm careful I'll last a couple of years." "An optimist, my boy, an optimist. Now, you go to Sir —. He'll tell you the truth. And I'll bet you he won't give you to the end of this season." "Well, I don't think you look so well yourself," Straw-hat burst out. "Those bags under your eyes, and your colour— Good God, what was that?" he broke off. *That* was a sixer or a four that bounded over the rails into the pavilion seats. "Another four to Constantine," said the third of the party, who *had* been watching the game. "By God, he's black," cried the man with the pouches under his eyes. "They wouldn't have let black men play here in my time." And the two continued their discussion as to how long the other fellow had to live, and never watched the virile performance of that dusky, husky hurricane, Constantine. After one punching hit which split Hearne's finger and disturbed a couple of sparrows as it crashed against the rails, after the applause had subsided, Straw-hat remarked: "I don't think there are as many sparrows on the ground as there used to be." And Pouch-eyes replied: "No, I don't think there are."

Cricket is as life is, always uncertain. You may be a champion

of champions, and have made three consecutive centuries. You stride out of the pavilion to the applause of thousands. The sun hits you on the back, the wicket is plumb easy and the bowling you are facing you have thrashed before to every corner of the field. And the first ball is a shocking full toss. A safe four to the leg boundary and you only snick it as it drops, and it hits your legs and somehow removes the bails. And you walk back in silence, but you hear an old member whisper : "Overrated, my dear sir. Overrated." Until the last ball is bowled you are never certain. Look at this match I am watching now. Sussex seemed to have a firm grip on the game. They had made 316, and half of the Middlesex side were out for 105, and only four wickets to fall, one man, Durston, unable to bat. What were the odds against them equalling the score ? 10 to 1 ? And they made well over 400 and won the match.

That is what makes cricket the greatest game in the world—the fascinating uncertainty and the lessons it teaches : never swank, never give in, never be over-confident, never be unsympathetic, never be depressed at defeat, nor crow at victory, and never lose your sense of humour.

As at cricket, so in life, I have experienced its every feeling—the sweetness of victory, the bitterness of defeat, the joy of anticipation and the sorrow of realization. But whatever blows Fate has dealt me, so far I have been able to see the accompanying humour and not beat my head in despair upon the ground. There are many things I would forget. There are many things I would like to remember—had they but happened. I would forget the pain I have caused those I loved and who loved me. I would like to remember that every friend I knew had remained a friend. But adversity is a sure test of friendship's value. It is only when you are down that you can prove your true friends, just as in success you can prove your true enemies. And I love a true enemy as I love a true friend. An enemy who plays fair and seeks to beat you down is the salt of life. It keeps you keen if you get up in the morning and wonder whether the enemy is going to get one in to-day, and how. And if you are unable to circumvent him, and you take the count, then you've something to look forward to, to get one back. But never must you let your enemy know how much he has beaten you. And always play it fair and square. Of friends I have many, many, but only the one enemy. And you all have him—Mr. Bad Luck. Of some people he takes no notice whatever. Others he never leaves alone. And he has no mercy. No prayers nor tears can move him. He is pitiless. But clever, so clever, and with the keenest sense of humour. Staggering under his punches sometimes, I have had to laugh at his methods of attack. And if you are prepared for him he does not seem to hit as hard, or it hurts less. Sometimes, if you laugh heartily

at him, he becomes sensitive and leaves you alone for quite a while. Or he lets you down easy. For example, I bought three tickets in this year's Stock Exchange Sweep. Well, naturally Mr. Bad Luck wouldn't let me draw a horse. I didn't curse him. No, for he might have hit me much harder. I *might* have drawn the Aga Khan's horse or the late Earl of Rosebery's nomination, Midlothian. Ah, I've got you on the hip this time, Mr. Bad Luck. What can you do now, you old sticker? I would cry to him. I get an offer of £10,000 for a portion of my ticket. "No, I'll wait," I say to myself, "the odds will shorten. Even if he doesn't win, there's second and third." And then Mr. Bad Luck taps at your bedroom door the following morning, waking you from a wonderful dream of Rolls-Royces, greyhounds down at the farm again, and he hands you the morning paper. The Aga Khan's horse *not to run*. Or if you have drawn Midlothian. "Death of the Earl of Rosebery. Derby nomination void." Now that would have been a real good knock-out blow. But you never really are aware of his existence until you are successful at something or other. Then something happens to upset the apple-cart and you say: "Why?" "Oh, it's just bad luck," your friends say. And so he is introduced. "Good morning, Mr. Bad Luck. What's your stunt to-day?" you should say as soon as you wake. He may leave you alone then, for he hates not to take you by surprise. But as sure as you forget his existence, he will come up behind you when you are all smiles, and give you such a kick up the pants. "Forgotten *me*, had you?" And he has the most extraordinary twists. I knew a man years ago, and he was down-and-out and talked about suicide. I argued with him, but I knew he had made up his mind to do it sooner or later. It was, without question, a way out of his troubles, and he left no one behind to grieve. So he took his revolver and went out into a paddock and slipped in a cartridge, put the muzzle in his mouth and drew the trigger. And the revolver did not go off, for he had not worked the cylinder into the correct position. Then up comes Mr. Bad Luck and takes a hand. My friend takes the barrel out of his mouth and squints sideways to see the position of the cartridge, and as he does so he pulls the trigger, and off goes the cartridge. But it does not kill him. No, oh dear no. Mr. Bad Luck has seen to that. He is stunned, and when the noise brings some workmen to the spot, he is carted off to the nearest doctor. Then he recovers, but the sight of both eyes has gone. He had made no allowance for this enemy. He had forgotten him. He told me all about it when I met him some time after I had returned from Fiji. "Bad luck, wasn't it?" he said. Yes, just "Bad Luck". Do all the things that are considered to bring him post-haste to your side. Walk under ladders, lace your right shoe first, wear a peacock feather in your ear if you like, have a necklace of opals, see that you

sleep in Room No. 13. Do all these things openly, brazenfaced, and he won't take any notice. But do any of these things unconsciously and he comes dancing in front of you. "You walked under a ladder. Look at your hat." You do so. There's a great blob of tar on it, and you're lunching with your best boy and are late already. Or you slept the night before in Room No. 13, and you sit down to tea with your black-haired fiancée, and she draws your attention to a long golden hair on your shoulder.

And so, looking behind now for the last time, I remember many a like jest. And I remember all my good, tried friends and I forget nothing. Companionship, friendship, love—I have had my full share of all these. But the three most wonderful things in life are a mother's good-night kiss, the look of devotion in a dog's eyes, and the clutch of a baby's hand.

To all whom I have met I wish good life, good love, good friends. I remember you all. I look no longer behind, but in front. For I have turned my face to the wall.

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